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ABSTRACT

This document contains the four issues of Northwest Education published during the 2002-03 school year. Issue themes are: (1) "Closing the Gap: How Northwest Schools Are Raising Minority Achievement"; (2) "Focus on Writing"; (3) "The Hidden Disability: When Bright Children Struggle To Learn"; and (4) "Discoveries in Learning: Lessons from Lewis & Clark." Typically, each issue consists of a lead article that reviews current research or provides an overview of matters related to the theme, followed by articles describing model programs and practices or profiling relevant experiences in schools of the Northwest--Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Alaska. Issues also contain information on related resources, book reviews, letters from readers, and practitioner commentary. (SV)

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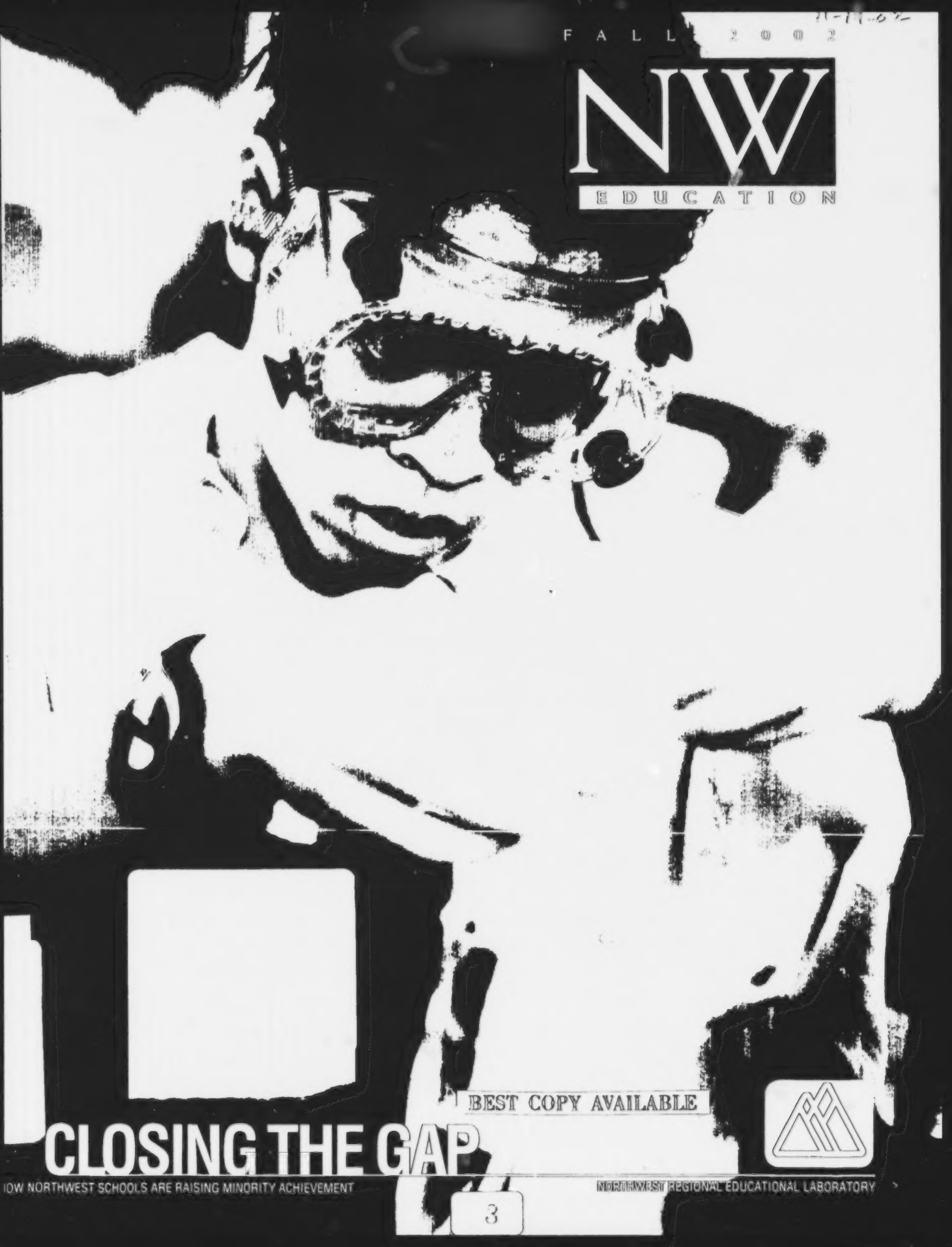

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CLOSING THE GAP

HOW NORTHWEST SCHOOLS ARE RAISING MINORITY ACHIEVEMENT

NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

NW EDUCATION
VOLUME 8 NUMBER 1
FALL 2002

ON THE COVER:
Ernest L. Estes, shown here as a junior at Portland's Benson Polytechnic High School, performs an experiment on the heat of fusion in his honors chemistry class. Now a senior with a 3.9 GPA, Ernest plans a career as an electroengineer in the audio industry.
PHOTOGRAPH BY MOUNT BURNS.

Closing the Gap

How Northwest Schools Are Raising Minority Achievement

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Studies and news stories on the U.S. crisis in minority education have created a veritable Mount McKinley of paper and electronic output since the mid-1990s. That's when national and local test data began to alert researchers to an alarming trend: The achievement gap, which had narrowed in the '70s and '80s, was yawning yet again. White students were once more outpacing black, Hispanic, and Native students in the classroom.

Just about every educational, journalistic, and political group has weighed in on the issue: the NAACP and the College Board. The National Black Caucus of State Legislators and the U.S. Congress. The *Phi Delta Kappan* and the *New York Times*—to name a handful. As philosophically divergent and geographically scattered as the studies and the discussions are, they nevertheless coalesce around one common call to action, ranking even as a national imperative: Close the gap. Do it, they say, for the kids who ought to have a chance to become physicists and physicians, photojournalists and playwrights, politicians, prosecutors, professors, principals, pharmacists, psychologists, paleontologists, percussionists, painters, potters, and every other possibility in a world of endless possibilities. In a democracy whose long-term viability rests on equality of opportunity, the varied voices agree, every child must get the best education available.

This call is arguably the toughest challenge facing schools today. Some say it can't be done without deep social change. As long as kids come from poor homes, broken families, and violent neighborhoods, they reason, schools can't hope to do better. But the research tells a different story. Studies by the U.S. Department of Education and others have turned up islands of excellence in a picture that is admittedly bleak. There are schools beset by poverty and burdened by past failures that have turned things around for their minority students—schools where the staff has refused to settle for a status quo that limits the possibilities for children of color.

No magic formula will bring minority kids to parity with their peers. But researchers and practitioners have turned up a wealth of promising ideas—both strategies and attitudes—that make a difference. "No single policy or program can ensure the school success of every child, but a combination of approaches can," renowned researcher Robert Slavin writes in an issue of *Educational Leadership* titled "Reaching for Equity" in December 1997/January 1998. "Research in education is increasingly identifying the kinds of approaches we could use if we decided as a society to end the poor academic performance of so many of our children."

In his article, "Can Education Reduce Social Inequity?" Slavin identifies three keys to success:

1. Begin to think of all children as being "at promise." Slavin counsels: "Build on cultural and personal strengths. Accept nothing but outstanding performance. Respond immediately and intensively if children start to fall behind."
2. Start early. "Research on programs for three- and four-year-olds," he says, "finds consistent and powerful impacts of high-quality early childhood programs on the cognitive performance of young children."
3. Work on many fronts at once. "Effective schooling anticipates all the ways children might fail," Slavin notes, "and then plans how each will be prevented or quickly and effectively dealt with."

In this issue of *Northwest Education*, we take you on a journey to some of the beacons of equity within the Northwest where ideas like these are yielding results. You'll travel from the Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana's remote Rockies to the congested inner cores of Portland and Seattle; from the agricultural heartland of Eastern Washington to a neighborhood of immigrants and blue-collar workers in Anchorage.

—Lee Sherman
shermanl@nwrel.org

To Realize The Dream

RESEARCH SHEDS NEW LIGHT ON HOW EDUCATORS CAN FULFILL THE BOUNDLESS PROMISE THAT MINORITY CHILDREN BRING TO SCHOOL WITH THEM

By LEE SHERMAN

The research literature is awash in alarming statistics about the current achievement levels of America's minority children. In this ocean of bad news, a couple of findings bob to the surface as *extra* disturbing—the kind of information that makes you catch your breath for a second and then reread the words just to be sure you didn't get it wrong. One of these items is from the front end of the system, when children first take their seats in the classroom for their educational voyage: Disadvantaged kids, especially boys, who enter school as high achievers start to disengage from school in *the first grade*. The other piece of startling news comes from the back end of the system, when youths leave the schoolhouse behind: More black men today are in prison than in college.

These two facts—one reported in August by the Justice Policy Institute and the other in 2000 by the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement—form the sad bookends on the school careers of too many minority children.

But the research is clear: It doesn't have to be this way. In spite of tough odds at home—rough neighborhood, empty bookshelves, sparsely stocked fridge—children can learn. And despite the uphill climb facing struggling schools—embattled budget, distracted parents, ethnic and linguistic diversity—teachers can teach. A number of recent studies from prestigious research groups have uncovered abundant evidence that all sorts of schools in all sorts of neighborhoods can, in fact, educate all sorts of kids at high levels. And do. In releasing the results of a 2001 study showing that several thousand mostly minority schools are meeting and exceeding standards in their states, Kati Haycock of the Education Trust is unflinching in her remarks. "Those who didn't believe in the educability of all children could dismiss [high-performing, high-minority] schools as exceptions, as freaks, as outliers," she told *Education Daily* in December of last year. "Well, that is about to change."

PHOTO BY MOUNT BURNS

A GAPING SEPARATION

Calling the problem a "gap" understates its depth and severity in U.S. schools. Secretary of Education Rod Paige characterizes it more graphically as a "gaping separation" in student achievement. Robert Slavin of Johns Hopkins University asserts that Americans face nothing less than a "crisis of equity" in their educational system.

The facts bear out these charges to a staggering degree. Consider this litany of statistics from various sources, including the National Center for Education Statistics, the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement, the Education Trust, the National Educational Goals Panel, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress:

- Out of every 100 white kindergartners, 88 will graduate from high school or obtain a GED, 59 will complete some college, 26 will obtain at least a bachelor's degree. For African American kids, the numbers are 82, 45, and 11; for Hispanics, 63, 35, and eight; and among Native Americans, 58 will graduate from high school and seven will obtain at least a bachelor's degree.
- Only one in 100 17-year-old African American kids and one in 50 Hispanics can read and understand the science section of a newspaper, compared to one in 12 white kids.
- Only one in 100 17-year-old African American kids compared to one in 10 white kids can solve a multistep math problem.
- When African American and Hispanic youths graduate from high school, they have attained the same level of performance in reading and math on average as white kids attain at eighth grade.
- Only three in 10 African American and four in 10 Hispanic 17-year-olds have mastered the usage and computation of fractions, commonly used percents, and averages, compared with seven in 10 white students.
- While African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans together make up 30 percent of the U.S. school-age population, in 1995 they accounted for only about 13 percent of bachelor's degrees, 11 percent of professional degrees, and 6 percent of doctoral degrees.
- In the eighth grade, just 3 percent of African American and 8 percent of Hispanic students met the National Educational Goals Panel's "proficient" or "advanced" performance standards in math, compared with 44 percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders and 32 percent of white students.
- The latest results from the nation's "report card" found that among white students, 27 percent were below basic, while 63 percent of black youngsters and 58 percent of Hispanics were unable to demonstrate basic skills.
- Just 10 percent of black and 13 percent of Hispanic fourth-graders were considered proficient in reading on the last "nation's report card," compared with 29 percent of white students.
- While 42 percent of Asian American and 34 percent of white 10th-graders take college-prep courses, only 26 percent of black and 23 percent of Hispanic 10th-graders do so.

Slavin is blunt in his indictment of this dire picture and insistent on immediate action. "As educators, we cannot wait for U.S. society to solve its problems of racism and economic inequity," says the researcher, who earned his undergraduate degree at Portland's Reed College. "We can and must take action now to prepare all children to achieve their full potential."

The reasons for the lagging performance of minority students are complex. But a recent study commissioned by the College Board was able to tease out "at least five factors" that help account for the gap, *Education Daily* reported in 1999. They are: (1) poverty, (2) schools with inadequate resources, (3) racial and ethnic prejudice resulting in low expectations for minority children, (4) limited educational resources of minority families, and (5) cultural differences of certain ethnic and racial groups toward learning.

Clearly, some of these factors are woven into the social fabric beyond the reach of schools. This leads many people to "assume that there is an inextricable relationship between poverty, ethnicity, and academic achievement," notes Douglas Reeves of the Center for Performance

The dream is not yet realized .... For some children to have [a good] education while others do not is an injustice. If they are not learning, then something is wrong with the school system, not the kid.
—C.J. Prentiss, Ohio state senator, December 2001

> "Until many more students from these under-represented groups become high achievers, it will be virtually impossible to integrate completely the professional and leadership ranks of our society.
> —National Task Force on Minority High Achievement, 1999"

Assessment in the 2000 publication, *Accountability in Action: A Blueprint for Learning Organizations.*

But research is beginning to cut holes in long-held notions that schools have no power to overcome the disadvantages of home and neighborhood. The new thinking holds that students should be viewed not as burdened by deficiencies but as blessed by possibilities—that all children possess cultural, familial, and personal strengths upon which schools can build.

"A decade ago," says Haycock, "we believed that what students learned was largely a factor of their family income or parental education, not of what schools did. But recent research has turned these assumptions upside down. What schools do matters enormously."

As executive director of the Education Trust, a nonpartisan organization advocating for poor and minority kids, Haycock oversaw a 2001 study to find high-performing schools in traditionally low-performing neighborhoods. The nationwide analysis, *Dispelling the Myth Revisited,* turned up 2,305 schools with at least 50 percent black or Hispanic students that scored among the top one-third of schools on statewide math and reading tests.

Other research endeavors reinforce the finding that minority students, and the schools they attend, can and do excel. A U.S. Department of Education study in 1999, for example, closely examined nine urban elementary schools serving kids of color in poor neighborhoods that are achieving impressive results—schools that are, in fact, reaching higher levels of achievement than most schools in their states or in the nation. Another study, this one conducted by the Center for Performance Assessment, looked at 135 "90/90/90 schools"—those with the following characteristics: More than 90 percent of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch, are ethnic minorities, and achieve high academic standards.

These studies, Haycock says, shatter the "creeping malaise" that has infected the educational system.

"Somewhere along the line somebody decided that poor kids couldn't learn, or, at least, not at a very high level—and everybody fell in line," she says. "But the truth is actually quite different. Some poor children have always learned to high levels, and some *whole schools* get *all* of their children to levels reached by only a *few* students in other schools."

BUCKING CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

The evidence is in—it can be done. The question is, How? There is no easy answer to this most critical of questions—no silver bullet, no one-shot training, no canned curriculum, no proven formula. But in a survey exploring the strategies of 366 top-notch schools from 21 states that had bucked conventional wisdom, Haycock's think tank found one dominant theme: an intense focus on "high academic expectations" for their students. In *Dispelling the Myth: High Poverty Schools Exceeding Expectations,* the Education Trust and the Council of Chief State School Officers report that these exemplary schools succeeded, despite poverty, by:

- **Using state standards extensively to design curriculum and instruction, assess student work, and evaluate teachers.** Fully 80 percent of the schools reported using standards to design instruction. Similarly, the successful schools in this study were using standards to assess student work and evaluate teachers.
- **Increasing instructional time in reading and math in order to help students meet standards.** A 78 percent majority of the schools reported providing extended learning time for their students. This time was primarily focused on reading and math.
- **Devoting a larger proportion of funds to support professional development focused on changing instructional practice.** Changes in the 1994 law require schools to provide for thorough professional development for teachers in high-poverty schools. The schools in this study seem to be moving faster than their less successful counterparts to comply with this provision. As important

is that the focus of professional development seems to be centered on helping students to meet specific academic standards.

- Implementing comprehensive systems to monitor individual student progress and provide extra support to students as soon as it's needed. Four out of five of the schools had systematic ways to identify and provide early support to students in danger of falling behind in their instruction.
- Focusing their efforts to involve parents on helping students meet standards. In these schools, traditional roles for parents and fund-raisers are giving way to activities that address parents' knowledge of standards, encourage their involvement in curriculum, and involve them in reviewing students' work.
- Having state or district accountability systems in place that have real consequences for adults in the schools. Nearly half the principals in these schools were subject to some kind of sanctions if their students fail to show measurable academic improvement.

The elements on this list, it turns out, capture many of the key factors that are emerging in the literature about equity and excellence among underserved populations. These factors are not separate and distinct; they merge and overlap. Still, it's possible to lay down some broad brush strokes for the critical elements in successfully educating minority students. Each school or district will then fill in the details from its own pallet of local needs and priorities. Research suggests that the following factors are absolutely essential to closing the achievement gap:

1. High expectations: This factor features rigorous curriculum geared to clear standards, as well as timely intervention for struggling students.

2. Excellent teachers: Good ethnic representation on the faculty and high-quality professional development are both critical here.

3. Early childhood education: High-quality preschool programs enhance cognitive development and ready children for school.

4. Schoolwide commitment: The entire staff is dedicated to the well-being of students and diligent in sticking with the reform agenda.

REACHING HIGH

Research shows that disproportionate numbers of minority students have been shunted off to special education classes, sidelined on compensatory education tracks, or saddled with watered-down curriculum. Underlying these practices, often, is a pernicious belief that minority kids aren't up to tackling challenging material.

"Teachers underestimate the intelligence of their black students, contributing to the test-score gap," *Education Week* notes in a 1998 article about the release of *The Black-White Test Score Gap* published by the Brookings Institution Press.

Researchers have found that teachers, especially white teachers, "held more negative expectations" for African American and Mexican American students than for white students, Geoffrey Borman and his colleagues report in the 2000 College Board study, *Advancing Minority Achievement: National Trends and Promising Programs and Practices*. For example, researchers have found that teachers who view Black English negatively rate kids significantly lower in reading comprehension if they speak Black English.

"All teachers tend to communicate their expectations to students in either subtle or overt ways," Borman writes. When teachers hold low expectations for certain kids, Borman says, they call on them less often, give them less time to respond, or provide the answer rather than help them solve the problem themselves. Teachers may also criticize these students more, praise them less, discipline them more strictly, and in general pay less positive attention to them. These kinds of negative or dismissive behaviors, the researcher notes, fuel the "disengagement and underachievement" of students who experience them.

Observing classrooms in high-poverty communities

Young people talk about teachers who often do not know the subjects that they are teaching. They talk about counselors who consistently underestimate their potential and place them in lower-level courses. They talk about principals who dismiss their concerns. And they talk about a curriculum and a set of expectations that feel so miserably low-level that they literally bore the students right out the school door.

—Kati Haycock, Education Trust, March 2001

over a six-year period, Haycock and her colleagues at the Education Trust have "come away stunned" at how little is expected of students and by the low level of assignments they get. In August 2001, *The New York Times* reported that Jack Jennings, director of the nonprofit Center on Education Policy, charges impoverished schools with a "general lack of rigor."

"Ask little of children in the way of academic achievement and little is what you tend to get," Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom note in their 1997 book, *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible*. "If the bar is raised, children work harder, and hard work is the road to success."

Recent findings show that all kinds of kids respond to challenging material that requires them to contemplate and cogitate. Borman cites research by M.S. Knapp in racially diverse, high-poverty schools showing that the more classrooms focused on teaching for meaning—"that is, geared mathematics instruction to conceptual understanding and problem solving, reading instruction to comprehension, and writing instruction to composing extended text"—the more likely students were to attain proficiency in higher-order areas. And they mastered basic skills, to boot!

Top-performing schools, researchers say, tie their rigorous curriculum tightly to district and state standards. "Clear and public standards for what students should learn at benchmark grade levels are a crucial part of solving the problem," Haycock says. "They are a guide—for teachers, administrators, parents, and students themselves—to what knowledge and skills students must master."

Haycock stresses, however, that many kids will need a leg up to meet those high standards and master that beefed-up curriculum. She says: "Ample evidence shows that almost all students can achieve at high levels if they are taught at high levels. But equally clear is that some students require more time and more instruction. It won't do, in other words, just to throw students into a high-level course if they can't read the textbook …."

> "The personal relationships among students and school staff created a powerful context for good behavior.
> —*Hope for Urban Education*, Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas, 1999"

Haycock is clear about what's required.

"One of the most frequent questions we are asked by stressed-out middle and high school teachers is, 'How am I supposed to get my students ready to pass the (fill-in-the-blank) grade test when they enter with third-grade reading skills and I have only my 35-minute period each day?'" she says. "The answer, of course, is, 'You can't.' Especially when students are behind in foundational skills like reading and mathematics, we need to double or even triple the amount and quality of instruction that they get."

TOP-NOTCH TEACHERS

In its 2000 report, *Honor in the Boxcar: Equalizing Teacher Quality*, the Education Trust bemoans the "pervasive, almost chilling" disparity in the quality and qualifications of teachers across neighborhoods. Analyzing data from several studies, the group found that kids enrolled in schools with high numbers of minority students are twice as likely to have teachers who lack state certification in their fields. In California, for example, 20 percent of teachers at high-poverty schools are not fully credentialed, compared with only 4 percent at other schools. In mainly minority high schools, the numbers are even bleaker. Only about half the teachers in high schools with 90 percent or greater minority enrollment meet even the minimum requirements in their states to teach math or science. Teachers at high-poverty schools are also less likely to have a college major—or even a minor—in their teaching field or classroom experience. And they bring weaker math and verbal skills to their jobs.

A 1998 Boston study of how teachers affect learning are typical of other findings. In one year, the top third of teachers produced as much as six times the learning growth as the bottom third of teachers. Tenth-graders taught by the least effective teachers made nearly no gains in reading and even lost ground in math.

"We take the students who most depend on their teachers for subject-matter learning and assign them teachers

with the weakest academic foundations," Haycock laments in *Education Leadership*.

Providing well-qualified teachers is one of the top recommendations in a report released last year by the 600 members of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators. The report, *Closing the Achievement Gap*, urges states and districts to increase teacher pay, provide alternative routes to teacher certification, develop induction and retention programs for new teachers, and come up with incentives to recruit more male and minority candidates into teaching. Minority teachers really do make a difference for minority kids, researchers are finding. Thomas Dee, a professor at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, found that kids with teachers of their own race scored three to four points higher on standardized tests than kids with teachers of other races.

LITTLE KIDS, BIG GAINS

When it comes to education, there is no such thing as too soon to start. The importance of early intervention cannot be underestimated. About half the gap between black 12th-graders and their white peers might be closed by "eliminating the differences that exist before their children enter first grade," asserts *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, edited by Christopher Jencks and Meridith Phillips.

Past findings on the impact of early childhood programs have been mixed. A couple of new studies, however, have gone a long way toward proving the power of well-designed programs for preschoolers.

One is the Abecedarian Project (named for a student who is learning the alphabet). This widely cited 20-year study, conducted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, found all kinds of promising outcomes among children who participated in an intensive, year-round child-care program from infancy through kindergarten. Funded jointly by the U.S. Education Department's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the study showed that participating kids were twice as likely to go to college as other kids. They scored much better on tests of intelligence, reading, and math all the way through young adulthood. They also tended to delay parenting.

Another key piece of research, the Chicago Early Childhood Study, achieved similar results. Financed by the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Education, the study followed graduates of urban preschools for 15 years. Researchers at the University of Wisconsin tracking 1,500 Chicago children from age 5 until after age 20 concluded that "programs like Head Start could pay dividends long after children had learned to read—provided the programs are highly structured," Jacques Steinberg of *The New York Times* reports in May 2001. Funded by Title I, the programs under study "adhere to rigorous reading lessons," Steinberg notes, as well as requiring parents to work with their kids on homework and helping families arrange medical care and social services.

In an editorial accompanying findings from the Chicago study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in May 2001, Edward Zigler, one of the creators of Head Start in the 1960s, argued that the results of the program could be replicated. The findings, he writes with co-author Sally Styfco, "contradict the naysayers who believe that public schools cannot be fixed or that poor children cannot be helped because of nature or nurture."

A MISSION, NOT A JOB

The Department of Education–sponsored study of nine top-performing urban schools found that success crystallized around one key component: staff commitment. "The true catalyst (of the change effort) was the strong desire of educators to ensure the academic success of the children they served," the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas concluded in its 1999 report, *Hope for*

The conventional wisdom suggests that parental involvement leads to improved achievement; however, in these schools, there was also evidence that the reverse was true—improved school achievement led to increased parental involvement.
—*Hope for Urban Education*, Charles A. Dana Center University of Texas, 1999

Urban Education: A Study of Nine High-Performing, High-Poverty, Urban Elementary Schools. All nine used federal Title I dollars to create Title I schoolwide programs. All the programs differed. But what stuck out was their uniform passion for the work at hand.

In their report, the researchers laud the tenacity of these dedicated professionals:

"None of the principals and none of the teachers interviewed reported that the transformation of their school was easy. In fact, there were many reports of difficulties, challenges, and frustrations. Perhaps, a key difference between these schools and other less successful schools is that educators in these schools persisted. They refused to give up the dream of academic success .... Perhaps, the persistence of school leaders was influenced primarily by their deep commitment to the students and families they served. They perceived their work, less as a job, more as a mission. They persisted because they believed in themselves, they believed in their school staffs, and they believed in the ability of the children to succeed." ■

"The research is clear: Rigorous standards, associated with frequent assessment and other effective techniques, allow students from every economic and ethnic background to succeed. These techniques, along with effective teachers, motivated students, and comprehensive accountability, provide the intersection between equity and excellence.
—Douglas Reeves, Center for Performance Assessment, 2000"

WINNING THEIR HEARTS

NATHAN HALE HIGH SCHOOL CREATES A MORE PERSONAL PLACE FOR KIDS

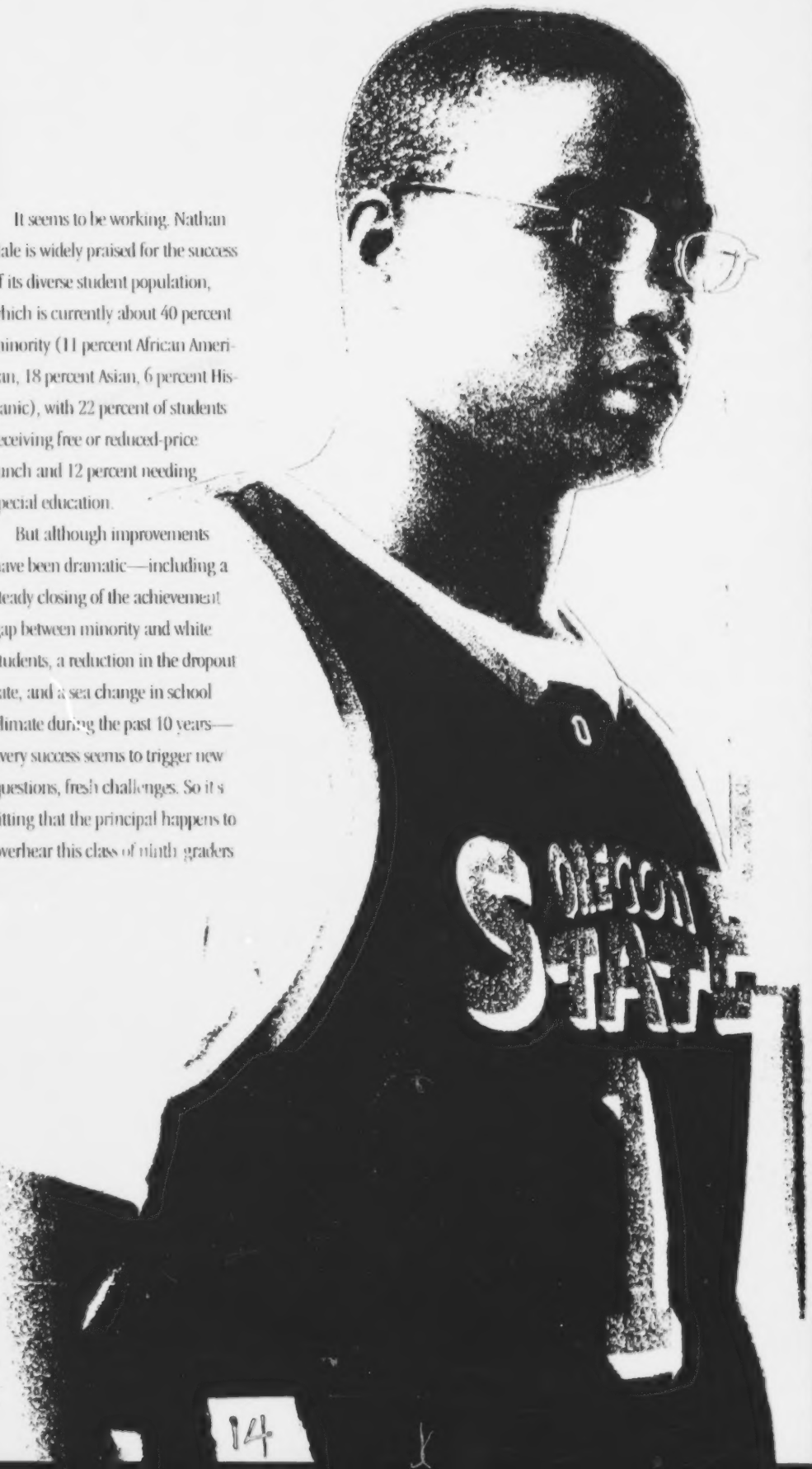
Story and photos by Suzie Boss

SEATTLE, Washington— Principal Eric Benson ducks his head into a ninth-grade English class just as seven students are settling themselves into a cluster of chairs pushed to the center of the room. From these "hot seats," they set out to lead a class discussion about Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*. Their teacher watches from the sidelines, ready to add a question or comment to keep things moving, but giving students the lead.

Benson tells a visitor that this is a typical classroom scene at Nathan Hale High School in Seattle's Lake City, an older neighborhood north of downtown lined with affordable homes, apartments, and a smattering of small businesses. "Our model is the teacher as coach," explains the soft-spoken principal who doesn't have to whisper to keep from interrupting the class. A few students glance in his direction, but they're not distracted. Kids are accustomed to seeing their principal often; indeed, in this four-year high school with an enrollment of about 1,000, Benson knows virtually every student by name. He continues: "You don't see a lot of classrooms where the chairs are lined up in rows with kids listening to lectures. We try to engage students to use their minds. Basically, that's the goal."

It seems to be working. Nathan Hale is widely praised for the success of its diverse student population, which is currently about 40 percent minority (11 percent African American, 18 percent Asian, 6 percent Hispanic), with 22 percent of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch and 12 percent needing special education.

But although improvements have been dramatic—including a steady closing of the achievement gap between minority and white students, a reduction in the dropout rate, and a sea change in school climate during the past 10 years—every success seems to trigger new questions, fresh challenges. So it's fitting that the principal happens to overhear this class of ninth graders



discussing a thorny philosophical question: *What is contentment?* In the context of high school reform, it's a question with no easy answers.

THE TREK BEGINS

Old-timers remember the day in 1992 when Benson arrived as principal. Sandy-haired and wiry of build, he had a dozen years in teaching and school administration under his belt, but Hale was his first principalship. "Before showing up, he had checked out a school yearbook and studied all the faculty photos. He knew us all from Day One," recalls language arts teacher Elaine Wetterauer, a 25-year veteran of teaching at Hale. It was a small thing, but it counted. In his typically low-key way, Benson let teachers know that he cared about them. "He's an exceptional leader," says Wetterauer, praising the principal for both his depth of knowledge about education and his ability to lead through collaboration.

Principal Eric Benson stresses the "teacher as coach" model at Seattle's Nathan Hale High School.

A decade ago, Hale High shouldered a tough image. "This was known as a thug school," admits Wetterauer. "There were problems." Because Seattle Public Schools gives families a choice of where to enroll their children, a bad rap means low enrollment. And negative perceptions are slow to change. "Through all those years, there were great kids and great teachers at the school," Wetterauer stresses, "and we [teachers] tried hard to improve the school's image. But we felt trapped."

Instead of arriving with his own agenda, Benson issued an invitation to the faculty. "He said, 'Let's get out of the building. Let's see what else is out there,'" Wetterauer recalls. It was another low-key idea with a big payoff. "In 25 years," she says, "I'd never been encouraged to look at other schools, to explore alternatives."

One fall night in 1992, Benson invited any interested teachers to join him for dinner at the University of Washington to hear Theodore Sizer and John Goodlad, prominent educators with powerful ideas to share about school reform. Eight Hale staff members attended. It turned out to be an auspicious evening —and has become the first entry in "The Trek," a logbook the school maintains about its ongoing journey toward excellence.

Eventually, Nathan Hale joined the Coalition of Essential Schools, an organization Sizer—the author of *Horace's Compromise* and *Horace's Hope*—founded in 1984 to promote school reform. Although Coalition schools adhere to a set of common principles, each charts its own course toward school improvement.

At Hale, the overarching strategy has been to promote a more personalized learning environment to foster success for all students. The transformation has been guided by a design process that involved the entire school community. School improvements are ongoing, and many challenges remain. But gradually, the school has reorganized around key features, including:

- Ninth-grade academies that create three smaller schools-within-a-school for the freshman year, with team teaching and block scheduling
- Integrated studies in 10th grade, with ninth-grade teachers typically looping up with their students for the two-year cycle
- 11th-grade American studies teaching teams with teachers sharing the same students
- Mentoring, in which every teacher —including the principal—is assigned a small group of students to shepherd through high school
- Inclusion, which means mixed-ability classes rather than tracking
- High expectations for all (for example, all students tackle challenging service projects during their junior and senior years—projects that previously would have been assigned only to students in an honors track)
- "Critical friends" groups to promote collaborative professional development within the faculty
- A belief that every adult on campus—regardless of job title—has something to teach

"It's all about personalization," summarizes Benson. "If you can get to that point, then you might have a chance to close the [achievement] gap."

CHANGING THE CULTURE

When he first came to Hale, Benson noticed that discipline was getting in the way of learning and teaching. Walking the hallways, he would overhear "foul language, a lack of respect. There were fights.

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Tensions." Suspensions and expulsions were handed out regularly—especially to students of color.

The school staged a three-hour summit. "We brought in facilitators and focused on relationship issues," Benson recalls. By the day's end, students agreed to participate in a campaign focusing on two themes: decency and trust. Today, school hallways and classrooms are adorned with signs bearing the slogan that students coined and agreed to live by: "Respect: Give it and get it."

Teachers aren't the only ones who appreciate the resulting change in school climate. Current students are quick to praise the atmosphere at Nathan Hale. "You won't find another school like this one," attests Jamal, an African American 11th-grader who has rebounded from a rocky middle school experience. "In middle school, my grades were low—down around 1.9 (grade-point average). I hung out with the thugs, the smokers. Now I'm carrying a 2.4," he says. "I still have my homeboys, my friends, but we branch out. We don't just stay in a clique. We all know everybody in this school. People will help you here. There's a lot of love."

A 10th-grader named Chanel, also African American, appreciates the mentoring program that matches each student with an adult staff member for all four years of high school. "You can talk to teachers here," she adds, "and they'll give you extra help. They're flexible. They want to help you succeed, even if you didn't have the best grades before you got here."

In a recent special report exploring the relationship between school discipline and race, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* singled out Nathan Hale for its positive and equitable school climate. Between 1996 and 2002, the number of African American students at Hale receiving a suspension or expulsion dropped from 150 to 20. In a 2001 survey, 84 percent of Hale students said they felt safe at school, up from 55 percent in 1994. "When it comes to erasing the discipline gap," wrote *Post-Intelligencer* reporter Rebekah Denn, "Hale's approach may be as promising as it gets."

THE JOY OF BEING SMALL

Through ongoing staff conversations about successful schools, Benson and his colleagues have concluded that effective high schools share two qualities: They're small, and they started out small. For Hale, built 40 years ago in the boxy design of a typical American high school, becoming new again wasn't an option. In 1997, when the school became a full member of the Coalition of Essential Schools and was moving forward to implement its reform agenda, Benson even tried to convince the district to close the building and reopen it after a yearlong hiatus. Then-Superintendent John Stanford refused the request, but agreed to a compromise on enrollment. "I asked if he could limit the number of ninth-graders coming in," Benson recalls. "He told me, essentially, that nobody wanted to go to Hale anyway, so limiting enrollment was not going to be a problem."

Becoming smaller has turned out to be a wise move. Benson credits the more intimate scale as being an effective strategy for boosting student achievement, particularly for students of color. (See sidebar.)

With only 1,032 students, Hale is considerably smaller than Seattle's Garfield or Roosevelt high schools, each with about 1,700 students. And these days, Hale has one of the longest waiting lists among high schools in the district. The irony isn't lost on Benson. He now has to be vigilant to prevent enrollment from creeping up. Another irony provokes strong opinions on campus: While the school has made a deliberate effort to recruit students of color and help them achieve success, white families are increasingly selecting Hale as their school of choice. Benson appreciates the school's jump in popularity, but says, "We don't want to become a white, North End school."

The freshmen academies, established in 1998, were one of the school's first steps toward making the school "feel" smaller. The three ninth-grade academies, each limited to 90 students, are carefully balanced to include students of mixed abilities. There is no tracking. Instead, the inclusion philosophy means that each academy—Red, Blue, and Green—includes students who are gifted, behind grade level, in special education, and learning English. "It's the whole gamut," says Benson. Student assignments receive the level of attention more typically found in a good elementary school.

"We look for a balance of gender, ethnicity, skill levels, everything," says Tina Tudor, coordinator for the ninth-grade program who is responsible for making academy assignments. The underlying goal, she says, is to give all students equal opportunities to experience success. "If students have only been in low-

Left: Student named Chanel says teachers are approachable. Right: Elaine Wetterauer helps students edit their video quilts.

tracked classes up to now, they've had few models of success in their classrooms," she says. With a more inclusive approach, she adds, "more class time is spent on instruction, which benefits everyone."

Each academy is assigned a teaching team of four to teach the core subjects of English, history, science, and health. Teachers have to apply specifically for these slots, agreeing to participate in team teaching and collaborative planning. Typically, academy teachers loop up with their students to the 10th grade, where integrated studies focus on biology, history, and language arts. Freshmen spend the first three hours of the school day in their academies, where teachers get to know them well and personalization is more than a noble goal. It's a fact of life.

Health teacher Devora Eisenberg, in her fifth year at Hale, says the academies create "a sense of community. It's definitely working." She knows the benefits of small schools firsthand, having graduated in a senior class of 18 students. "When it's smaller, you develop relationships that go beyond the superficial level. It teaches you to be more compassionate," she says.

Academy teachers are given planning time to work in their teams—an essential ingredient for the system to work effectively, Benson believes. "Collaboration is key. Historically, teachers have had very little contact with their colleagues, and kids have seen no connection from one subject to the next." In the academies, however, "these kids know that all the teachers on their team are keeping track of them," he says. Teaching a mixed-ability group is demanding of teachers. "You have to differentiate," Benson explains. "You aim for high levels and support those who need extra help." Students who are struggling because of low skills can elect to take focus classes in the afternoons that provide them with extra help. Students ready for more challenge can pursue optional assignments that take learning into more depth.

Planning time gives teachers a chance to coordinate projects, focus on individual students, or compare ideas about teaching strategies. A consistent approach is used throughout the academies for details such as how and when homework is assigned and collected. "It's set up the same way in every class, so there's not a lot of time spent getting used to teachers' different styles," Tudor explains. "Consistency is a key to success for our students. They hear that everyone is expected to do the same work, that the teachers have the same expectations for all of them. It's fair."

A uniform homework procedure is the sort of small but significant step intended to bring success within every student's reach—regardless of background or academic history. "Many students find themselves in a whole new role here: being someone who completes his or her work on time," says Tudor. Most students realize early into their ninth-grade year that they are being offered a chance to start fresh. "They see that high school does not have to be the four worst years of your life."

Some students arrive with a rocky history. They may have been unsuccessful in previous schools. They may have bounced around because of family issues or the bad breaks that often come with poverty. They may be adept at using distracting behavior to take attention away from low academic skills. "A lot of these kids have attended many schools before they get to Hale," says Tudor. "They've never had time for relationships to develop, never had time to finish their academic work." She describes a typical experience: "If they're struggling academically, their first reaction may be to think, 'How do I get myself out of this class?' But in the academies, there's no changing around schedules or class assignments. There's a commitment to stick it out. The message they get from the teachers is clear: We're in this together. We will not cycle you out," Tudor says.

SUSTAINING THE TEAM

Around Seattle, some 85,000 radio listeners regularly tune into 89.5FM for their daily dose of news and music. Callers are often surprised to learn that the broadcasts emanate from Nathan Hale High, where shows are produced by a "staff" of about 40 students. The 30,000-watt station, a campus greenhouse and horticulture program, and the integration of technology were among the features highlighted when Hale earned the status of "Cool School" in a past issue of *Teen People* magazine.

Broadcasting teacher Gregg Neilson, on the Hale faculty since 1977, calls the radio station a good example of "project-based learning. It's a way to keep kids engaged, interested. We give them opportunities for success so that they can apply what they know. They learn to write in English class, but they tend to be more engaged when they know that what they write will be heard by 85,000 people." Neilson adds, "They also learn to work together as a team," whatever their academic background or race. "They don't want to let each other down."

Yet even within this positive, team-building environment, voices of dissent are heard from time to time. A girl now in her junior year says she enrolled at Hale for a chance to work on the radio station,

Principal Benson talks with students over lunch.

and it remains one of her favorite classes. But she chafes at the school's inclusion policy. "You can only go as fast as the slowest person in the class," she says, "and it can take forever sometimes." The girl, who is white, says she would prefer to be taking all honors classes. "But teachers at Hale consider an honors track elitist," she says, "and racist."

Principal Benson acknowledges that the girl has hit on a hot-button issue. "It's an ongoing discussion. We do honors here," he points out, "but it's offered within the inclusive classroom. It's that idea of differentiated instruction," in which learning goals are high but teaching strategies are targeted at the needs of individual learners.

Hale veteran Elaine Wetterauer, also aware that there are dissenting views, elaborates: "We want to offer all kids work that is challenging. In English, students read books in inclusive classrooms that we used to offer only in honors classes." *Things Fall Apart* is now standard sophomore fare. All sophomores also study *Othello*. Wetterauer's 11th-graders read *Middle Passage*.

Under the old system, Wetterauer remembers, a sorting process took place that wasn't always equitable. "Sure, honors classes tended to attract the brightest kids. But some were only there because their parents wanted them to be—it was an entitlement issue. A lot of minority parents didn't know to ask for honors classes for their kids. They didn't realize it was an option. To close the achievement gap," Wetterauer insists, "you have to expect more of *all* kids. It has to be rigorous for all. That's the only way it's going to be fair."

At Nathan Hale, teachers do much more than pay lip service to a motto like "high expectations for all." Within their critical friends groups—through which 85 percent of the faculty participate in professional development—teachers push each other to examine their own practice. "We are much more intentional about meeting the needs of all kids," says Wetterauer, who has taken the intensive training required to become a critical friends coach. Looking back, she sees how far the staff has come. "It used to be, you'd hear teachers complaining. It was 'the kids this . . . the kids that . . .' Now, we don't blame the kids [if achievement scores don't meet goals]. We ask ourselves: What can we do as teachers to improve student achievement? To meet the needs of all learners? We're much more collaborative. Our goal is to close the gap. We don't always agree about how to accomplish that," she admits, "but you don't hear anyone dissenting about the value of helping all kids succeed."

Changing the culture and practices of a comprehensive American high school "is a hard nut to crack," admits Benson, who has earned high praise and hefty awards for doing just that. In 2001, Benson won Seattle's highest honor for a school administrator: the Thomas B. Foster Award, which comes with a $50,000 prize.

Although he's pleased at the school's progress, Benson knows that the finish line remains always just out of reach. He doesn't have time for complacency. At the end of a busy lunch hour spent monitoring the cafeteria line, Benson pauses to exchange greetings with a student. The boy, who has Down syndrome, tells Benson about the role he played in a recent classroom video about Rosa Parks. His pride is obvious, his smile dazzling. "Acceptance may be the real story here," Benson says as the boy heads off to his afternoon classes. "This has become a more personal place for kids. When that happens, then the other stuff—closing the achievement gap, differentiating instruction—all of that can start to fall into place. But you have to win their hearts first. Then you can do the rest of it." □

MEASURING UP

Supporting students who have not traditionally enjoyed academic success has been a goal of school reform efforts at Nathan Hale High School. Here's a look at key indicators that show the school is making progress in closing the achievement gap.

Washington Assessments of Student Learning (WASL) for 2001 showed Nathan Hale students of color still lagging behind their white classmates on key indicators, but outperforming students of the same race from across the Seattle district. For example:

- For African American students, 88 percent at Hale met standards for listening compared to 58 percent of African American students districtwide; 16 percent met math standards compared to 6 percent for the district; 48 percent met reading standards compared to 26 percent districtwide; 24 percent met writing standards compared to 17 percent districtwide.
- For Hispanic students, 87 percent at Hale met standards for listening compared to 60 percent of Hispanic students districtwide; 53 percent met math standards compared to 17 percent districtwide; 67 percent met reading standards compared to 36 percent districtwide; 50 percent met writing standards compared to 23 percent districtwide.
- For Native American students, 100 percent at Hale met listening standards compared to 77 percent districtwide; 44 percent met math standards compared to 26 percent districtwide; 78 percent met reading standards compared to 44 percent districtwide; 56 percent met writing standards compared to 32 percent districtwide.

On other measures, as well, Nathan Hale students are showing improvement. Between 1995 and 2001:

- Dropout rate declined from 7 percent to 3.2 percent
- Attendance rate increased from 83.5 percent to 91 percent
- Disciplinary actions declined from 21 percent to 8 percent

TQM and Tough Love

AT INNER-CITY APPLEGATE ELEMENTARY, THERE ARE HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND NO EXCUSES

By MAYA MUIR

ABBY MYERS, CEO OF APPLEGATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

PORTLAND, Oregon—Abby Myers calls herself CEO of Applegate Elementary School. But at 8:15 on a gray May morning, microphone in hand, the principal greets the students streaming into the cafeteria with the pizzazz of a Las Vegas performer. As the 50 percent of Applegate students who are entitled to free breakfast pile cinnamon rolls and French toast onto their plates, Myers sings over a taped accompaniment:

> Good morning, good morning
> Good morning to you.
> Our day is just beginning,
> There's so much to do.

As the food vanishes into hungry mouths, kids begin to sing along. Between verses, Myers works the crowd. "What's your purpose here today, boys and girls?" she asks.

"To learn!" pipe up a few voices from the K–3 audience.

"That's right!" Myers says. "To learn and take responsibility for your education," then lapses once more into song:

> The world is a rainbow
> With many kinds of people . . .

"And what are our three school rules?"

This is a little harder, but hands shoot up, and all over the room voices rise in a ragged but enthusiastic answer.

"Very good," says Myers. "Safety, respect, and responsibility." She follows with a quick chorus of multiplication tables as a third-grader points to equations projected on a screen in the corner. The volume level in the room climbs. By the time the first bell rings at 8:45, the group that entered as a sleepy, disparate rainbow of faces has been transformed. They leave for their classrooms alert, cohesive, and, to use Myers's word, "jazzed" to learn.

The learning at Applegate today is impressive. But it was not always so. This elementary school, located on the edge of industrial north Portland, was identified as one of 14 "crisis" schools in 1999 by the community-based Education Crisis Team, which challenged the Portland School Board to close the achievement gap between affluent, mostly white schools and low-income, largely minority schools. Applegate possesses the kind of demographics frequently associated with poor academic performance: nearly 80 percent of students hail from low-income families, a rising number speak English as a second language, and only about 25 percent start and finish their elementary education at Applegate. In 1999, fully 40 percent of the school's African American third-graders tested low or very low in math, with another 40 percent meeting or exceeding standards. In reading, almost 20 percent tested low, while about 60 percent met or exceeded standards.

A scant three years later, Applegate's test scores bear no resemblance to those discouraging numbers. In both math and reading, *not one child* at Applegate tested low in 2002. In reading, nearly 88 percent of African American students met or exceeded standards, while in math, 100 percent did so. Given a decade of budget cuts in Portland that have only intensified in the last few years, how was this possible?

Under Applegate's previous principal, LaVerne Davis, test scores had begun to climb upward. Myers, who took the reins in 2001, solidified those gains with her own distinctive approach, a combination of the results-oriented acumen of a businesswoman, an ability to focus on everything from the big picture to the smallest detail, and a tough-love approach.

The latter two qualities are evident as Myers walks the halls, registering every desk out of place, every child straggling in after the bell. "You're late, Jonathan," she says, greeting a sleepy-eyed second-grader by name, as she does every child. "Can't be late!"

"We have high expectations of every student," Myers comments as she walks past a sign on the wall that reads, There's no such thing as no homework at Applegate. "We have a no-fault, no-blame environment. The children know that they may even have to keep an eye on the clock and wake their parents up, if that's what it takes to get here on time. They have to take responsibility for their education."

The overall framework of Myers's educational approach derives, surprisingly, from business. It's Total Quality Management (TQM), a strategy developed by statistician and management consultant W. Edwards Deming, who used it most notably to retool the Japanese automobile industry. Since 1981, many U.S. enterprises have also adopted it. Myers first encountered TQM while she was a Title I coordinator at another struggling north Portland school, Portsmouth Middle School. There, where Myers was an integral member of a faculty group that instituted TQM, she became a believer. She finds the business model an excellent fit for the educational mission. "As a teacher, you're working toward a product, which is student learning," she says. "TQM allows you continually to make research-based modifications and adaptations to produce a better product."

Among other things, a research-based approach requires the constant collection of numbers about

First-grade teacher Janice Davis is guiding her young charges toward success at Applegate Elementary School.

performance. One of Myers's central innovations has been quarterly spreadsheets showing how each of Applegate's 215 students is performing. "If there's no improvement, we see it immediately and ask how to effect the change we need," she explains. "If a student shows effort, but testing demonstrates no gain, we ask, 'How can we change our practices?'" The spreadsheets are supplemented by a display in the conference room, where tags representing each student hang in columns indicating the level of test he or she has passed. This helps teachers get a clear visual picture of what's going on so they can readily share ideas for improvements. "Then," says Myers, "data can drive decisions."

To produce this data, assessment is continuous. "The school staff here has decided that quarterly assessments are required to mark student achievement, and I assess them in between, which means each student is evaluated every three weeks," says first-grade teacher Janice Davis. Every day, Davis asks one of her 19 students to read aloud to her. "If there's no progress, I get busy!" Davis says. Depending on the problem, she invites the student to join her after-school reading program or asks instructional specialist Vivian Colvin to work with the child.

Math spreadsheets recently

revealed an alarming trend: Girls, who were doing as well as boys through third grade, were falling behind by the fifth. "So we created a gender-based math club," says Myers. " Now girls' scores have risen to parity with boys'."

Child development specialist Barbara Pittman finds that having data on each student helps in her work, too. "I can see how many children I provided services to this year compared to last," she says. "I can map out differences in attitudes and behavior—like how many suspensions we had, or how many students were sent home." Pittman runs Second Step, a violence intervention program; EIA Bucks (Empathy/Impulse Control/Anger Management), a program that supports the Second Step curriculum; and Conflict Management peer helping and tutoring. The data at Applegate, Pittman says, show positive change in all these areas. "The children's self-esteem has improved," she reports. "And when people feel good about themselves, they achieve more."

Staff dedication is a crucial element in Applegate's success. "There's lots of after- school work here initiated by teachers, students, or their families," says Colvin, who stays until 6 p.m. most nights. "We find that even the kids are very willing to extend their days."

Yet staff were not always so unified behind a common vision. At the beginning of Myers's second year as principal, she and the staff undertook a two-day workshop to do the hard work of developing a common core of educational values. "We agreed on professionalism, respect, trust, commitment. By the end, everyone signed on to these values," says Myers. Myers also asked staff to place arrows on a board indicating their goals. Initially, the result resembled a weather pattern gone berserk, but by the end of the exercise, all arrows pointed the same direction.

However, the process of truly uniting all staff behind Myers's vision proved a little rockier. She expected that. One of her oft-repeated mantras is, "Change is hard, change is messy, change takes time." She notes: "When I came, SARAH also came," referring to an acronym for common reactions to change: shock, anger, resistance or rejection, acceptance, and, finally, hope. "SARAH was brutal last year," she admits.

A woman of prodigious energy, Myers cast a critical eye on virtually every aspect of how the school was run. For example, she read every report card teachers had written, correcting spelling errors when she found them. Not everyone appreciated such scrutiny, but all got her point: from now on every aspect of their work would be held up to inspection and high standards.

Myers also focused immediately on aligning curriculum with academic standards, and instituting best practices—giving feedback to students, for example, and using assessment results to guide instructional decisions. She organized the classes to ensure small size, and began to hold professional development workshops on site so that children could see that adults are learners, too. Last year, Myers had teachers rate workshops and report how useful they were; she put those data into a spreadsheet to help people make more efficient choices in the future.

ONE OF MYERS'S OFT-REPEATED MANTRAS IS, "CHANGE IS HARD, CHANGE IS MESSY, CHANGE TAKES TIME."

Like their teachers, students at Applegate encounter substantial support along with high expectations. Myers has invited all students to review with her the data that are accruing about them, from attendance to performance, in their cumulative record folders. With Myers's help, they decide what accomplishment they are most proud of and where they want to improve, and then devise strategies to accomplish their goals.

Myers applies a similarly open approach to discipline. "We had two kids slapping each other recently," she says. "I showed them the part of the school manual on behavior and left them alone to problem-solve. They came up to me later and said they realized I could suspend them, but they proposed lunch detention instead." She smiles. "I accepted their proposal."

Myers works continually to build more partnerships and find more resources for the school. She and the staff have tapped a variety of sources, for example:

- Student teachers from the University of Portland run the 15-computer lab
- Run for the Arts brings in the Young Audiences program, which brokers visits by visual and performing artists and provides funds for art supplies
- Members of a local church spent a week painting the hallways
- Owners of a nearby McDonald's sponsor assemblies and contribute coupons usable as incentives for the students
- AmeriCorps volunteers work with at-risk kids
- The Oregon Food Bank delivers food for needy families
- Through the Architect in the

Schools program, an architect donated time over six weeks to work with students on projects relating to his field.

Several local doctors have "adopted" particular classes, buying them materials, assemblies, and the use of buses for field trips.

The 1950's-era school building also reflects the resources and effort that staff, parents, and children have put into the school. Halls and rooms are bright and clean, walls covered with class projects, explanations, and reminders. Posters show what it was like on "Vehicle Career Day" and advertise Chess for Success and the after-school girls' club.

But the primary way the children are supported is by the intense attention they receive daily from staff, in class and out. "We all want to make this a positive experience for the kids," says Janice Davis. "Everything fits together in our program. We collaborate a lot. We're hearing each other. I'm always asking, 'How can I better prepare my kids for that end of the hallway?'" She gestures toward the upper grades.

Kindergarten teacher Jill Iverson, who has been at Applegate for 22 years, agrees. "The emphasis here is on staff working together, and the administration supports that."

As you walk the halls, it's clear that at Applegate no child is anonymous. Not only do the principal and the teachers know each student, but so do Colvin, Pittman, and the office staff. The small size of the school helps make this possible, and the administration works to preserve that atmosphere. Within it, children prosper. "Students here are not just meeting expectations, they're excited about possibilities," says Colvin. "I see openness, eagerness, and confidence."

Iverson believes that changes at the district level have also been important in supporting improvement. "The institution of student report cards that are the same across the district makes a huge difference," she says, "not to mention the increased focus on standards and benchmarks. These help us know what's going on with the children and help us to keep them focused." Iverson also appreciates the new districtwide math curriculum—Investigations in Numbers, Data, and Space published by Dale Seymour Publications—and the professional development that prepared teachers to use it. In general, staff development has been crucial in encouraging improvement. At staff meetings, Myers keeps routine business at a minimum so the staff can remain riveted on educational concerns.

Although parents are supportive of the changes in the school, Myers admits that they have been slow to get involved. "We have many single and working parents, many grandparents raising their grandchildren," she says. "Plus, many parents never experienced school as a positive place when they were students. We're working on creating a culture and climate that is friendly. It seems to be happening. We have about 60 percent coming now to our family nights."

Although improvement at Applegate has been significant, even stunning, Myers and her staff hope for still more. When the principal arrived, she sent out a needs assessment to discover what kind of school the community wanted. The answer came back loud and clear: a center for arts and technology. Today, several architectural drawings of a proposed two-story technical center drawn by volunteers from the firm of SERA Architects hang at the end of the hall—a vision of what the school could become. But the vision looks more and more like a chimera in the brutal, ever-tightening budget squeeze that has been wringing programs and dollars out of the district for more than a decade. The total allocation for running the building this year is a scant $15,000; a third of that is eaten up by rental and service on a copy machine! Last year, Myers wrote a grant proposal to the Portland Public Schools Foundation for money to plan an infusion of arts into the curriculum. That proposal was turned down. So at the moment, the community's vision remains a dream. But Myers—ever the optimist—hasn't given up. "We are currently looking at any and all grant opportunities for funding," she says.

As the morning's motivational breakfast draws to an end, Myers leads a rousing pledge of allegiance and one verse of *My Country 'Tis of Thee*. She then looks over the crowd, waiting for quiet. Into the momentary hush she says, "Third-graders, future leaders of America, exit, walking."

The kids move out with confidence. Maybe they don't have a brand-new building or access to all the arts and technology possible. But they know they're getting a good education—as good an education as anybody. □

FROM DIVISION TO VISION

Achievement climbs at a reservation school high in the Rocky Mountains

Story by Lee Sherman
Photos by David Spear

PABLO, Montana—The Flathead Indian Reservation rests in the embrace of the mountains collectively known as the Rockies. To the passerby, the endless towers of basalt seem to merge together, mile after mile. People who live here, however, distinguish individual ranges with names known mostly to the locals. The Mission, Flathead, and Swan ranges recede into a deepening violet haze to the east. The Bitterroot, Salish, Cabinet, Coeur D'Alene, and Purcell mountains blend and overlap, one into another, in a nearly impervious divide to the west. To the reservation's north, icy Glacier National Park feeds the river that rushes into the jewel of the valley, Flathead Lake, whose surface changes from jade green to deep amethyst as a storm gathers high in the surrounding peaks.

In this protected valley, among the sage and the scrub, a little ciderblock school is moving mountains of another sort. Decades of sub-par achievement among the Native children of the reservation are, at last, on the upswing at Pablo Elementary School. Credit belongs to a wide-reaching mix of people and factors. They include a research-based school reform model that matches local needs, a local community dissatisfied with the status quo, a district insistent on raising standards for all kids, and, most critically, a tireless staff that tore headlong into an improvement plan with dogged determination.

Achievement is on the upswing for Native students at Pablo Elementary.

Scores on standardized tests are up dramatically (more about that later). But there are signs of academic success that transcend numbers. A recent reading lesson for a group of third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders during the schoolwide 90-minute reading block, for example, strides broadly across the intellectual landscape. From the particulars of a piece of literature—today it's "Dream Wolf" by Paul Goble—students venture into local history, Native lore, current events, environmental issues—wherever, in fact, the trails of ideas might lead them. Under the skillful guidance of veteran teacher Carolyn Pardini, students travel beyond basic vocabulary to poetic imagery. Discussions of plot lead students well past simple story lines to complex interpretation of action, motive, and character. On this stormy morning in mid-May, there is, clearly, a whole lot of critical thinking going on.

ROOTS OF CHANGE

Pablo Principal Andrea Johnson's roots run deep here. Back in the days when a barge ferried folks across Flathead Lake to Kalispell, Johnson's grandmother was one of the children who attended tiny two-room Pablo School. Johnson's parents and in-laws all trace their upbringing to the farms and ranches of this valley.

Principal Andrea Johnson at Pablo Elementary School

"This was coming home for me," she says of her move into the leadership role of the struggling school several years ago. "It helps if you have an understanding of the community and the diversity and how everybody's interconnected."

A less spirited person might have balked at the academic, behavioral, and political challenges that were inhibiting student performance at Pablo. Not Johnson. This is a woman who often races through the Montana night in an ambulance as an emergency medical technician, rescuing people from car wrecks and suicide attempts because she has insomnia and likes to "stay busy." She's also done search-and-rescue on horseback and in scuba gear. Clearly, she likes to come to the aid of people in trouble.

That is a trait she sorely needed when she arrived at Pablo Elementary, where the problems seemed as steep as the ski slopes of Blacktail Mountain on the west shore of the lake. Of the school's 260 students, 65 percent are American Indian and represent 32 distinct tribes. Achievement data showed a wide and persistent achievement gap between Indian students and white students in all subject areas. But the problems were not limited to academics. Tensions simmered not only between Native and white students, but also among local Native kids (those hailing from the Salish and Kootenai tribes) and those whose parents came from other towns and reserva-

tions across the country to attend Salish-Kootenai College in Pablo. Behavioral referrals were too high. Some scuffles even came to blows. Then a review by the U.S. Office for Civil Rights found a disproportionate number of referrals among Native kids in the Ronan-Pablo School District. The reservation's tribal government, the Confederated Tribes of the Salish and Kootenai, demanded reform.

The picture was made infinitely complex by thorny problems hidden beneath students' low scores and angry outbursts. Kids whose grandparents spoke a Native tongue, for example, might come to school without fluency in either English *or* their ancestral language, making literacy doubly tough to tackle in the classroom. And a lot of the students are descendants of family members who, early last century, were torn from their families at young ages and forced into boarding schools where they were systematically stripped of their language and culture. The resulting bitterness and suspicion among many Indian people toward government-run schools is a persistent undercurrent in the dealings between parents and educators on the reservation.

But Johnson, who's accustomed to digging into twisted metal and broken bones at car crashes, didn't blanch at moving back to the reservation and bringing her own three children to the school district.

The change process began five years ago when Ronan Public Schools administration, responding to tribal concerns for educational equity that coincided with new state requirements for standards-based reform, engaged the whole community in improving education on the reservation.

"Our strategic planning came about because of a huge rift between the Indian community and our school administration and school board," says Terrie Alger, who has lived and taught in the community for 16 years. "We knew we needed to do something to put us back on the right track."

Yet when the principal asked Alger to represent Pablo Elementary in the planning process, she at first refused.

"I said: 'Not me. Conflict is not a place where I'm comfortable.'" Reluctantly, she allowed herself to be persuaded to go to the first meeting. She told Johnson up-front, however, that "if everyone's yelling and screaming and fighting, that's it—I'm done."

But a gifted Missoula based professional facilitator named Virginia Tribe, hired by the district, kept the lid on the bubbling pot of friction. Over a yearlong series of meetings, she helped to redirect the school community's energies from division to vision.

"Virginia Tribe moved that polarized group to a cohesive, unified group that set a real strong vision for our district," Alger recalls. "In the end, what's best for kids rose up like cream off all the other issues."

The district's eloquent vision statement leaves no doubt about the centrality of children's overall well-being in the community's expectations for its schools:

With this ideal as a guidepost, each district school—a high school, a middle school, and two elementary buildings—then under took a comprehensive needs assessment after receiving training from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL). Not a stone was left unturned.

"We looked at curriculum and instruction, we looked at achievement data, attendance data, school climate—everything we could look at about our kids from Grade One up," Johnson says. "We asked the kids, 'Do you like math, do you like lunch, do you like riding the bus?' We asked, 'What's your favorite subject and why?' When we were done, it was *very* clear what our needs were."

RONAN-PABLO PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND THE COMMUNITY JOIN IN PARTNERSHIP TO PROVIDE A SAFE, ATTRACTIVE, AND ORDERLY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT. **THIS** POSITIVE CLIMATE PROMOTES HEALTHY LIFESTYLES WHERE STUDENTS REALIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFE-LONG LEARNING, TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIGH PERSONAL STANDARDS, AND FEEL A GREATER SENSE OF SELF-WORTH AND BELONGING. **EACH** INDIVIDUAL WILL LEARN TO CELEBRATE AND BE RESPECTFUL OF OUR RICH MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY, AND STUDENTS WILL LEARN TO APPRECIATE THE UNIQUE HERITAGE AND HISTORY OF THE **FLATHEAD RESERVATION.** **THIS** PARTNERSHIP STRIVES FOR A STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE WHERE ALL STUDENTS ACHIEVE THEIR HIGHEST PERSONAL EXPECTATIONS AND ARE PREPARED TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN TODAY'S COMPETITIVE GLOBAL SOCIETY. **IN** THIS LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, STUDENTS WILL GRADUATE, PREPARED TO PURSUE THEIR LIFE CHOICES AND TO ATTAIN THEIR PERSONAL VISIONS OF SUCCESS.

Students pair up for reading, which is "sacred time" at Pablo Elementary School

From that clarity four goals emerged. The school set out to increase:

- Student achievement in language arts, reading, and math
- Attendance (to help boost achievement)
- Social skills, anger management, and problem solving (to decrease violence)
- Meaningful parental involvement

After visiting schools that are using various "off-the-shelf" school reform models and sizing them up against Pablo's goals, the staff decided almost unanimously to adopt Success for All, a widely used program developed by Robert Slavin and colleagues at Johns Hopkins University. (For more about this and other models, see NWREL's *Catalog of School Reform Models* at www.nwrel.org/scpd/catalog/aboutshtml.) They liked its systematic reading and language arts approach, and the solid research that seemed to vouch for results. But what really clinched the choice, according to Johnson, was that Success for All rests heavily on cooperative learning strategies —groups of kids discussing a piece of literature, for example, or pairs of students deliberating over "meaningful sentences" (they call the activity "think, pair, share," or "buddy buzz"). Studies have shown that because Indian children are raised in a culture of mutual support and collaboration, they are often uncomfortable in competitive or highly individualistic settings (see "Teaching to the Rainbow," Page 28). With Pablo leading the way, a number of Montana's reservation schools—Heart Butte, Browning, Poplar, Lame Deer—have since adopted Success for All.

"The cooperative learning strategies are very culturally congruent for Native American students," Johnson notes. "And cooperative learning is a linchpin of the Success for All program. Heart Butte was *ecstatic* with their scores last year. So we may have been the first, but we're not the last."

The cultural fit shows in the comfort level of the kids exploring the nuances of "Dream Wolf" in Pardini's reading group. As part of their study of the story's vocabulary (words such as *kinship, quantities, incomplete, shelter, wounded, roamed*), the mixed-aged class, fully engaged and on-task, looks for "inferential clues"—hints in the surrounding words and context—that tell them what the word means. They work in pairs to create sentences about *twilight*. They collaborate to write, edit, and embellish their descriptions as a class. The imagery that emerges captures not only the poetry of that magical merging of daylight and darkness, but draws upon the landscape of northern Montana and the personal histories of the children who live there. The students speak of owls hooting and coyotes howling. Of frogs croaking and crickets "singing the song of the night." Of the evening star rising bright above the mountains and of neighborhood friends "sneaking around in the shadows" before running home for dinner.

A discussion about the word *century* brings up images of ancestors and antiques and ancient trees. Safara shares a sentence that reads, "My great, great grandmother had a pair of moccasins that was 100 years old."

Moving on, the teacher guides the class through a talk about Goble's story of a wolf who rescues some children lost in the woods. She uses the Success for All "Treasure Hunt" study guide, which poses a series of probing questions about the text, as a starting point. But Pardini expands and localizes the discussion wherever she can. Starting from speculation about whether the wolf that visited Tiblo in the cave was real or a figure in a dream, she draws the kids into talking about the "spirit animals" that people the mythology of many Indian tribes.

After a pause to marvel at a sudden snow flurry falling unseasonably late, even for Montana, outside the classroom window, she moves on to recent news about the Ninemile wolf pack that roams nearby Glacier park. The pack, reintroduced in northern Montana a decade ago and struggling to survive where wolves had been all but eradicated years before, has stirred strong passions among environmentalists and ranchers in the area. "I think this is a little different story for us than for someone in St. Louis or even

IN HER OWN WORDS: Julie Cajune

MOVING FROM TOLERANCE TO CELEBRATION

Julie Cajune has the distinction of being the only full-time Indian education coordinator for a public school district in the state of Montana. Her passion about her work on the Flathead Reservation grows in no small measure from her own rootedness in the region. Her multiethnic heritage—a mixture of Scotch-Irish, Nez Perce, Ojibwe, and French—also includes Salish, one of the tribes native to the reservation in the Rockies where she grew up. Here she talks with deep conviction about what's needed to address the achievement gap in the schools of Pablo and Ronan.

"I was just talking with people yesterday about how we would describe a culturally responsive school environment. If you look at Indian education historically, it hasn't been a very bright picture for Indian people. There is still a very vivid memory of the boarding school era. So we are still dealing with a great percentage of the Indian community that has a certain level of distrust for the school institution, and for whether the school has the child's best welfare at heart.

"Part of what we're doing is trying to change that perspective by offering things that *include* the community, but actively soliciting this involvement in something more meaningful than a bake sale or a chocolate sale—something that will actually impact how their son or daughter feels at school.

"The other thing is that I feel all children have a right to see themselves reflected in the school. Kids should come to school and feel like it's *their* school. Indian students have not felt that public schools are their schools—rather, it's a place they go that's very different from their home and community, a place that sometimes tells them things that are in direct conflict with what they're being taught within their community or family context. So there's a dissonance that they experience as a young child, a disequilibrium that may grow into conflict at the adolescent stage. We're looking at trying to provide a supportive environment for students who feel disenfranchised and for families that feel disconnected and devalued.

"Funds of knowledge that Indian people have are just beginning to be valued. They *weren't* valued in the past, and people were told, 'Those aren't worth anything, you need to let them go.' It was the assimilationist idea that was common educational practice for generations. We're trying to reverse that. We're saying, 'These funds of knowledge *are* important. They're part of the literacy of an American citizen.' That literacy level is really low. Indian people are still probably the least understood minority group in America. There are still *huge* misunderstandings.

"Some of a culturally congruent education is representing kids so they feel like, 'This is my school. This school values and respects who I am, my family, my history, and some of my perspectives, and is willing to share some of *my* stories.' It's presenting a balanced perspective so that children are offered a broader picture of the world and a more inclusive curriculum. That's an obligation that the school has. Educators have an ethical obligation to offer their students the broadest perspective that they can, because children are going to create their own learning. We shouldn't be pouring it out—giving them a dish of it. We should be facilitating. We're mediating between the child and the learning opportunity, hopefully in the best way possible with that child's interest at heart.

"When we're doing life science and talking about trees, we talk about tribal forestry and local tree species. I think it's great to learn about the Amazon rain forest, but wouldn't it be nice if kids could go outside and show you a lodgepole pine, a Ponderosa pine, a Douglas fir, and explain the intergenerational impact of local land-use practices?

"So it's an interdisciplinary curriculum that provides an historic context for understanding Indian people today, that we're still here, we have a (tribal) government, we're involved in managing natural resources. One of the things that draws people here, the pristine environment, is the result of tribal management, of stewardship of the environment. The tribe has taken a leadership role in environmental law. The Salish and Kootenai tribes were the first to establish a wilderness area. The reservation has a cleaner water standard than the state—that's an advantage that people here share whether they're Indian or non-Indian. The school district participates in the annual "River Honoring," where the tribes host 1,000 kids for two loops along the Flathead River, with eight stations on each loop. The kids do everything from writing to art to hard sciences—measuring and testing water, looking at land management and riparian zones, identifying native and exotic fish species. The elders go down and talk about the historical and cultural significance of the river.

"The tribe has incredibly rich resources to offer schools for learning. Schools are just beginning to see in the Indian community an asset rather than a deficit. That's what we had hoped—that rather than *tolerance*, we would look at *celebration*."

Seattle," Pardini says, looking at the young faces, rapt before her. "We aren't going to have wolves running through Pablo, but we could certainly have them using the Mission Mountains to travel." She gestures toward the east where the range lies obscured by the mid-May storm. "The wolves," she says, "are coming back. Do we have them in our hearts and our minds?"

"JUST LISTEN"

Reading is more than just critical at Pablo—it's sacrosanct. *Nothing* interrupts the daily 90-minute reading block that immerses first-graders in Success for All's research-based "Roots" of reading skills development and launches them in second grade on the "Wings" of reading proficiency. (*Roots and Wings* is the companion reading curriculum for Success for All.)

"The 90 minutes of reading is sacred time—that's what we call it," says Johnson. "We don't have assemblies during that time, we don't have field trips during that time. We want to have at *least* 170 days out of the 180-day school year when we have reading instruction."

Kids are grouped by ability for reading instruction across grades. But they don't get stuck or labeled. Rather, every eight weeks their reading skills are assessed and the groups are reformed to reflect either success or struggle. If a child is excelling, she moves up to a more advanced group. If she's lagging, she gets a tutor until she catches up. No student is left floundering or failing in the back row. Teachers meet regularly with each student, and problems are nipped in the bud. Fully 30 percent of first-graders, 20 percent of second-graders, and 10 percent of third-graders at Pablo receive one-to-one tutoring in reading.

At first, some of the teachers were a little bit squeamish about Success for All's emphasis on systematic phonics, used especially in the first two grade levels when kids need to grasp the raw mechanics of sound-symbol relationships. Johnson, like many other teachers, was trained in whole language at universities where "phonics was the 'f' word," she jokes. But she stresses that phonetics is just a means to understanding, and that comprehension remains the primary focus and ultimate goal of the reading program.

"Kids need *all* the tools in the toolkits," Johnson asserts. "They need to be able to decode. They need phonological awareness, vocabulary, and fluency in order to be able to comprehend. But as soon as they get the basic sounds, they're on to literature."

Just two years into the new approach, Pablo was already seeing a big payoff. Between 1999 and 2001, for example, the percentage of fourth-graders meeting state standards shot up from 50 percent to 80 percent.

"We have seen a jump in every subject area," says Johnson. "The data show that it's working, and especially for the bottom half. Not only that, we have a lot of kids who are now reading *above* their grade levels, and that is exciting! We've got kids reading at the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade levels."

"Discrepancies still exist," she admits, "between white and Native American kids, but not in growth. We continue to make more growth as a school than is typical."

The school is on track for meeting its other goals, too. Attendance is up by 15 percent. Referrals are down by 40 percent. And while significant gains in parent involvement remain elusive, the staff is hoping to overcome Indian parents' wariness over time. Terrie Alger advises new teachers who are dealing with Native parents for the first time to "just listen."

In a heartfelt way, the longtime reservation educator says: "I honestly think the key to establishing trust is to listen carefully and to ask a lot of questions—basically, good communication. Often we have parents who come in to speak to us who appear to be very, very angry. Your natural response may be to become defensive. But I think we have to understand that when we're dealing with our Native parents, what looks like anger toward us may really be grief for all that they have lost as a culture." □

Dr. Brian McNeill
Chair, Diversity and Faculty of Color Committees
College of Education
Washington State University

TEACHING TO THE RAINBOW

Washington State University plays a leading role in grooming new teachers to work with kids of color

We at the College of Education at Washington State University are firmly committed to issues of cultural and individual diversity. This commitment is reflected in the activities and policies of our Diversity and Faculty of Color Committees, dedicated to providing leadership in improving the educational experiences and outcomes of traditionally underserved populations both in the state of Washington and nationwide.

"Within a College of Education, work related to diversity is such an important part of what we do—perhaps the very most important part," says College of

Education Dean Judy Mitchell. "We need to be continually mindful of our impact on future generations as we prepare education professionals to work with all the world's children. We must do everything we can to honor the differences among us, to recognize and value our diverse cultural perspectives and heritages, and to help others do the same."

Here, some of our faculty members share a brief look at their work in addressing these issues through teaching, research, and service to the community.

- *Dr. Gisela Ernst-Slavit of WSU-Vancouver's Department of Teaching and Learning documents strategies for improving schooling for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students that again stress the importance of one's unique culture in developing language skills, and advocates for a comprehensive approach in responding to the diversity represented in Washington's classrooms.*
- *Dr. Michael Pavel of the Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling Psychology at the WSU Pullman Campus, a Skokomish tribal member, describes the efforts of a partnership formed by faculty from WSU, Northwest Indian Community College (NWIC), and Lummi Reservation community members to train both Native and non-Native teachers in the culturally unique socialization processes related to the learning styles of Native American children in order to improve their outcomes in the classroom.*
- *Dr. Armando Laguardia, who chairs the Task Force on Diversity in the Teaching Force for the Association of Teacher Educators, addresses the necessity for our national teacher workforce to mirror the changing demographics across the United States. Laguardia, of WSU Vancouver, describes his efforts to form a national partnership to address the critical shortage of ethnic and racial minority teachers in our schools.*

While the work of these researchers and scholars reflects only a sample of what our faculty and programs are engaged in with diversity issues, they are demonstrative of WSU's strong, ongoing commitment to addressing issues of cultural and individual diversity throughout our College of Education.

—Dr. Brian McNeill

"Students construct meaning from reading or through writing text first, and then move on to focus on correct language structures or genres."

SO KIDS CAN LIVE THEIR DREAMS

How schools can help English language learners overcome barriers to bright futures

By Gisela Ernst-Slavit

In 1991, while I was working on my doctorate in Florida, I asked Pablo, a high school junior from Venezuela, what he would do after graduation. He responded right away using perfect English: "I want to play professional basketball." I then asked him what would happen if he didn't grow tall enough to make it. He responded, "I will play professional soccer." I pondered and asked him what would happen if he didn't grow strong enough to be a football player, to which he replied, "I will then be a baseball player." A bit frustrated, I inquired some more by asking what would happen if he had some kind of minor disability that would impede him from being a professional athlete. This time, this tall young man thought about his answer and replied: "Well, I guess there is always McDonald's."

Many students like Pablo enter schools in the United States with big dreams but little formal schooling. The challenges for these students are colossal. They must learn to read, write, understand, and speak English. They must develop academic literacy in English in order to make the transition to the labor force or into other educational programs. And they must become socialized into American society during adolescence, a time of major emotional, physical, and psychological change.

For Pablo, becoming socialized into American pop culture had not been a problem: He was into sports, wore Nike shoes, and watched plenty of MTV. He also had a great, almost-native English accent. Yet when it came to writing lab reports, literary criticism, position papers, other conventionalized genres of writing, or reading his textbooks, he fared very poorly. In fact, Pablo was in serious trouble academically.

How can schools assist students like Pablo? How could Pablo's teachers have provided more opportunities so that he could have had another shot at learning how to write a term paper?

Schools that meet the challenge presented by LEP students such as Pablo follow practices that are consistent with research on effective schools. Schools need to:

- **Have high expectations for *all* students.** Teachers, parents, students, and communities need to hold and communicate high expectations for LEP learners so we can have students who value school and value themselves as learners.
- **Draw on students' backgrounds and experiences.** Lessons begin and revolve around students' unique experiences, cultures, languages, knowledge, and interests.
- **Make learning meaningful; form will follow.** Students construct meaning from reading or through writing text first, and then move on to focus on correct language structures or genres.
- **Offer choices to students.** When students have opportunities to exercise choice in selecting their writing topics, books, and research projects, their interest and chances for success are increased.
- **Organize collaborative activities and scaffold instruction.** Design activities that will be achieved jointly and "scaffold"—provide support—so students can eventually work independently.
- **Engage students in active participation.** Most students learn by doing, not by observing.
- **Involve parents and community.** Parents, teachers, community members, and students can become a community of readers, researchers, and learners exploring topics of interest to the group.
- **Engage students in theme-based curriculum.** Organizing curricular activities around interwoven and challenging themes is especially helpful for LEP students because they can see the big picture and recycle vocabulary, both of which increase understanding exponentially.
- **Follow the "whole-part-whole" approach.** Lessons begin with whole texts (for example, magazine articles, books, poems) to maximize understanding, and then move to an analysis of reading process components such as strategies, or smaller units of language (e.g., spelling, punctuation, tenses), and end with a summary of major concepts within the text.
- **Immerse students in language and print.** The best way to learn a language is by using it. Classrooms that are saturated with print and with opportunities to use language for a variety of purposes become superb learning environments.

This comprehensive approach about good teaching strategies is more likely to be successful than strict reliance on any one program or intervention. No single strategy can by itself bridge the achievement gap for LEP students. Providing equal opportunities for all students will depend essentially on the degree to which classroom teachers are able to institute classroom practices and curriculum that systematically respond to the diversity represented in their classrooms. However, implementation of these practices is in fact dependent upon supportive school staff and programs, district guidelines, and state language policies that recognize language diversity as an asset and not a handicap.

While the recommendations above are directed to classroom teachers, the responsibility needs to be shared by all those in the building. Only when all the adults in a school talk about "our" students—rather than "those" students—when referring to the LEP students can all students achieve success.

"The child-rearing practices of many tribes impress upon children norms such as generosity, sharing, social interdependence, and cooperation."

WHEN CULTURES CLASH IN THE CLASSROOM

Training in Native ways gives teachers the sensitivity to work effectively with Native kids

By Michael Pavel

Research has shown that Native students' culturally influenced learning behaviors, communication styles, and values are often misinterpreted in the classroom and clash with their teachers' dominant-culture perceptions of how a "normal" student learns and behaves. Research on Native students' difficulties in dominant-culture classrooms has yielded three major findings about their learning behaviors and the conditions they typically encounter at school.

First, Native students from many different tribal backgrounds learn best by processing visual information—as, for example, they observe and then model the behavior of parents, elders, and older siblings. A curriculum development committee of WSU faculty, NWIC faculty, and community members from the Lummi reservation participated in an effort to revise standard teacher training curriculum to be more sensitive to Native learning styles. We have found that our students at NWIC have the most difficulty acquiring new skills when they are taught only through verbal instruction. Unfortunately, verbal instruction is still the predominant mode of communication in public school classrooms.

Moreover, in our work with school districts in Washington state, we have seen that Native children of many different tribes also avoid public performance of new skills and are unprepared or ill-at-ease when pushed into doing so without adequate opportunity for private practice. In our Native teacher preparation program, we feel that the steps involved in the acquisition and demonstration of knowledge at home versus school are reversed. At home, observation, private self-testing, and demonstration of a task for approval are essential steps in the learning process. In school, Native children are expected to learn by responding publicly to direct questions from teachers even if they are uncertain of the answers, and opportunities to practice new skills privately before performing them publicly are rare.

Lastly, Native children from numerous tribal backgrounds are socialized to avoid competing with peers and are more likely to participate in classroom situations that emphasize cooperation rather than competition. The child-rearing practices of many tribes impress upon children norms such as generosity, sharing, social interdependence, and cooperation. In comparisons of white and Native students, whites were found to be more competitive and, even when cooperative behavior was rewarded, they still preferred to compete with classmates rather than cooperate.

It is clear that assimilationist education policies aimed at changing Native students' learning styles have failed. Given that the strength of cultural identity is actually beneficial to Native student academic success, the only reasonable course of action is to address teacher training to be more responsive to the needs of Native learners. A widely accepted strategy to improve American Indian and Alaska Native student learning outcomes is increasing the number of Native and non-Native teachers who are properly trained to meet the needs of Native students. (See the Indian Nations At Risk Task Force final report, *Indian Nations At Risk: An Educational Strategy for Action*, U.S. Department of Education, 1991.)

Although Native Americans are one of the youngest and fastest growing segments of our population, Native people make up fewer than one-half of 1 percent of those currently teaching and only 1 percent of those enrolled in teacher

training programs. As a result, Native students are denied valuable role models as part of their educational experiences. Both statistical and observational research suggest that the absence of adequate numbers of Native teachers and the lack of specialized training for both Native and non-Native teachers may place Native students especially at risk for attrition. White students, too, are being deprived of the chance to learn from teachers of color who embody the increasingly diverse world in which they are growing up.

This disparity led WSU and NWIC to develop a partnership to train more Native teachers. The partnership is founded on the belief that properly trained teachers can develop trusting relationships with students and make the difference between promoting negative stereotypes and portraying realistic and empowering views of Native peoples. It focuses on recruiting and training Native teachers on or near their communities because these students come into the classroom with prior life experience with Native language and culture.

It is our firm belief that both Native and non-Native teachers benefit from training that focuses on American Indian and Alaska Native learners. At present, however, most mainstream universities provide little or no training pertaining to Native learners. As a consequence, teachers being trained today do not necessarily know how to translate cultural sensitivity into teaching techniques proven effective with Native students, especially if those students come from an array of different tribal cultures.

Teacher instructional styles do have a significant influence on Native students' classroom participation rates and academic success. It is essential that teacher preparation programs provide teachers with the knowledge and experience of how to incorporate Native students' learning strengths into classroom instruction. Teachers must be taught to build on Native students' existing learning repertoires in ways that do not compromise their cultural identities or spark their resistance.

"Minority teachers are more likely to bring a critical social justice orientation and consciousness that stems from their experiences with inequality."

TOWARD A MORE EQUITABLE FUTURE

Recruiting teachers of color is essential for reaching an increasingly diverse student population

By Armando Laguardia

Recent studies are detailing the significant impact that teachers of color can have on student performance and institutional change. Their presence in our classrooms has untold potential power. (See "The Power of Their Presence: Minority Group Teachers and Schooling" by Alice Quiocho and Francisco Rios in *Review of Educational Research*, Winter 2000).

Minority teachers are more likely to bring a critical social justice orientation and consciousness that stems from their experiences with inequality. They are ideally positioned to communicate with students from minority cultural backgrounds in ways that encourage them to participate in their education, and are having a positive impact on student achievement. And they tend to have a greater sense of how to develop culturally relevant curriculum and to understand the human, social, and communal nature of teaching and learning.

For these reasons, there is a strong need to encourage our colleagues in teacher preparation and the educational systems to set as a professional goal increasing the number of minority students interested in becoming teachers. America is facing a general teacher supply crisis. Administrators, policymakers, and legislators

are clamoring for "highly qualified teachers," while many principals and personnel directors can't even find "warm bodies" to fill classrooms. Last year, state legislatures passed more than 70 new laws impacting teacher quality: from new tests for licensure to signing bonuses for new teachers. In the midst of this widespread teacher shortage, the critical need to recruit more teachers of color and to bring cultural competence to the teaching profession is being largely overlooked.

Each year for the past decade, the public school student population has grown and become more diverse. According to U.S. Department of Commerce data, about one-third of public school students are members of racial and ethnic minority groups; by the year 2035, that number will climb above 50 percent. Unfortunately, we can't say the same for our teacher workforce. The teaching profession is losing ground in terms of the parity between students of color and teachers of color. Fewer than 14 percent of teachers are minorities, and projections anticipate a significant decline. Astoundingly, fully 40 percent of America's schools have no minority teachers at all.

A number of promising steps have been taken in recent years to begin closing this glaring gap. Before coming to WSU, I helped create the Portland Teachers Program, a very successful minority teacher preparation program operated as a partnership between Portland State University, Portland Community College, and the Portland Public Schools. (For more on the Northwest Teachers Program, see *Northwest Education* magazine, "New Teachers: From Surviving to Thriving," Winter 2001). More recently, I worked with several national organizations—including the Association of Teacher Educators, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the American Association of School Personnel Administrators, the American Council on Education, the National Education Association and Recruiting New Teachers—in a partnership to sponsor a national summit on the issue. Convened in November 2001, the summit, Losing Ground: The Crisis of Diversity in America's Teaching Force, addressed the critical shortage of ethnically and racially diverse teachers in America's schools and the lack of cultural competence in the teaching profession. The summit initiated the process for formulating a national movement designed to successfully reverse the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in our public school teacher workforce. A plan for action and an implementation strategy are being developed to sponsor local, state, and national initiatives.

The need to bring the resources that minority group members bring to the teaching profession makes the need to institute teacher preparation programs that recruit and support them a must for the future of the American teaching force. □

THE GIFT OF TWO

Marisa Zuno guides her first-grade through a Spanish reading lesson at Greenwood Hill Elementary School.

ANGUAGES

A Spanish immersion program brings Government Hill Elementary back from the brink

Story and photos by Judy Blankenship

"Closing the achievement gap absolutely can be done, but it takes well-trained people with a vision, and extra resources. I just can't say that often enough."
—Carol Comeau, Superintendent of Anchorage School District

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—Early on a frosty April morning, a five-minute drive north from downtown Anchorage takes one across the long expanse of the C Street Bridge, spanning the tracks of the Alaska Railroad and the fishing docks of the Cook Inlet. Straight ahead is Government Hill, named in the era of the great federal government Alaskan railroad construction project, from 1914 to 1923, when thousands of job seekers and adventurers poured into Anchorage. The workers and their families lived up on this hill, out of the muddy lowlands of Ship Creek, as Anchorage was then called. Today, the area still has a transient feel, with strip malls of launderettes, small stores, and quick-food restaurants, and blocks of low-rent apartment houses and trailer parks.

Just off the main road, right next door to Elmendorf Air Force Base, sits Government Hill School, one of 61 elementary schools in the Anchorage district. A sign in Spanish at the main entrance signals to a visitor that this is no ordinary school: *"Dèle a su hijo el regalo de dos lenguas,"* it says. "Give your child the gift of two languages." In the hallway on the way to Señora Zamora's first-grade room, a small boy who appears to be heading for the bathroom, hall pass swinging from his wrist, greets a man walking in the opposite direction. "Hey, Carlos! What's happening?" the man says, stopping to hug the child before going out the exit. "Is that your father?" a visitor asks Carlos. "Nah," he says, "that's my friend Leo's dad."

This affectionate encounter between a child and a parent would never have happened 10 years ago, according to anyone who remembers Government Hill school then, when parent involvement was nil, a series of principals had come and gone, teachers fled after a year or less, discipline problems were high, and test scores were rock-bottom low. The school had already closed once in the late 1970s for meager enrollment. As Alaska's boom-and-bust economy shifted from oil-based to service-based, immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Ecuador, and many other countries were drawn to Alaska seeking job opportunities in hotels, restaurants, and other tourism-oriented sectors. One of the city's pockets of low-rent housing where these families settled was Government Hill. By 1992—reduced to just 165 students—it was on the verge of shutting its doors again.

"All the neighborhood parents who could had left the school, and those students who remained were for the most part from poor homes in the largely transient population of the area," recalls Carol Comeau, director of elementary education in 1990–1993 and now superintendent of the Anchorage School District. "We were having serious discussions whether to close the school and put the students on a bus to some other school, or do something totally different and designate the school as an alternative program."

Fortunately for the neighborhood, and for the city, the second option won out.

Today, Government Hill is one of the great success stories of the Anchorage district, with nearly 500 students and an award-winning Spanish immersion program that

has parents from all over Anchorage on the school's waiting list. In 1999, three years after the alternative program was launched, the school was recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as one of several dozen "distinguished" Title I schools in the country, and the only one in Alaska. By 2000, the school's California Achievement Test scores in reading, writing, and math had made the biggest gains in the district over a five-year period, and Government Hill was honored as the Alaska Bilingual Program of the Year. In 2001, the school won nationwide recognition as one of only six schools in the country to be awarded the National School Change Award.

A LOTTERY FOR ENRICHMENT

Back in Marissa Zamora's classroom, Carlos joins his classmates for the morning song of opposites. As Zamora points to the words in a big book, enunciating clearly in Spanish, the children sing and go through the motions of high and low, hot and cold, and in and out. Zamora—an animated woman with smiling brown eyes who came to Alaska from Oregon nine years ago because, she says, "I wanted to go somewhere where I can ski outside my door every day"—moves rapidly on to practice with numbers, using speech, writing, fingers to count, and coins to figure, all in Spanish. "How many are absent today? How many for hot lunch? What's the date? What combinations of dimes, nickels, and pennies can we use to make the date? Talk to your neighbor." Children huddle to discuss the numerical worth of a dime, some in English, some in Spanish, and some in "Spanglish," a creative mix of the two languages. "Español, por favor," Zamora, gently reminds those who slip exclusively into English.

Carlos and his classmates—about half are native Spanish speakers and half native English speakers—will spend the morning in Zamora's classroom, where everything from the travel posters to identifying stickers on the furniture, and all instruction, is in Spanish. After lunch, they will go into the classroom next door, where Zamora's teaching partner, Nancy Morris, conducts the afternoon lessons in English. For the native English-speaking students, who are selected through a lottery process, Government Hill offers an enrichment program they are eligible to enter only up until Christmas of first grade. For Spanish-speaking children, the school is a high-quality bilingual program, open at any level up to sixth grade. Those who arrive with limited English are given extra tutoring. The goal for all students in Alaska's only dual immersion program is academic achievement at or above grade level in both languages.

Meanwhile, Denise Rosales is stationed at a table in a corner of Carlos's classroom; pulling aside a few kids at a time, she helps them finish a seasonal art project—ceramic casts of their hands for Mother's Day spoon-holder gifts. Rosales, one of several professional staff who first came to the school as a volunteer, is a bilingual tutor, trained to help meet the needs of any child in the classroom, from behavioral problems to remedial English. Rosales's three children have gone through the immersion program. "The purpose of sending our kids here is so they won't lose their Spanish, so they can communicate with their grandparents in Guatemala," she says.

Helping Rosales is Gloria Teniente, who identifies herself as "Wyatt's grandmother." She has volunteered in her grandson's classroom five mornings a week since he began kindergarten. She says, "I was a working mother when my girls were growing up and I didn't participate, so now I want to pay back and help out the kids."

A SIMPLE IDEA

So how did a failing neighborhood school transform itself into a high-performing learning community—a school where grandparents volunteer five days a week and parents become professional staff? A school that attracts—and keeps—creative teachers? A school that is able to win multiyear, federal grants totaling more than a million dollars?

Like many successful transformations, this one began with a simple idea. Back in 1992, Janice Gullikson, world languages coordinator for the district, had just returned from visiting immersion programs around the country—and been particularly impressed with a dual-language school in San Jose, California. Then she found herself in a meeting discussing the fate of Government Hill. "The school already had a large number of students who spoke Spanish," Gullikson recalls, "so I suggested we start a dual-language program, where native Spanish-speaking students would be actively recruited and seen as an asset."

Gullikson's idea met with enthusiastic support from the principal at the time, as well as the district and several PTA parents who were ready to fight to keep their children in their neighborhood school. "We decided to go for a three-year, Title VII bilingual grant because we knew the funds were out there," Gullikson continues, "and we built in a planning year to allow us time to get ready."

After a year of preparation,

Government Hill launched its dual-language experiment with 50 students —25 native Spanish speakers and 25 English speakers— in two combined kindergarten and first grade classrooms. Recruitment of students was a challenge in the beginning, Gullikson recalls, because of the school's reputation and its location. She gives a nod of gratitude to those "risk-taking parents" who, despite misgivings, enrolled their children and became solid backers of the program. Many of those first students are now in the Spanish immersion program at Romig Middle School, and the district has plans in the works to create a high school immersion program, as well.

Still, it was a rocky beginning, remembers Kim Amaya, who started as a parent volunteer when her daughter was in the first class. Now a kindergarten teacher, Amaya says: "We were all still figuring out how dual immersion works, and we probably should have started out with just kindergarten. There was a lot of concern, especially among Spanish-speaking parents who were not convinced it was a good idea for their children to be learning in Spanish, and some left." The next year, kindergarten and first grade were taught separately.

The larger problem, however, was the divide between the immersion students—who constituted less than 25 percent of the school population but were benefiting from all sorts of new resources, plus highly motivated parents—and the neighborhood children, who came to school with the same old problems: poverty, transience, and unstable families. "The principal, Shirley Abrams, worked hard to build bridges between the Government Hill community and the immersion parents," says Superintendent Comeau, remembering the struggle of the first two or three years. "She also did a fine job reaching out to create school-business partnerships." Volunteer reading tutors were recruited from AlasCom, a neighborhood business, and from Alaska Railroad, which also sponsored an annual back-to-school barbeque. "As word got out," Comeau says, "more and more Government Hill families began to come back to their neighborhood school."

GALVANIZING THE SCHOOL

As the end of the three-year grant cycle approached, a group of energized teachers, parents, district personnel, and community members came together to develop a new vision for Government Hill that would encompass both the immersion program and the neighborhood school population, which had grown to include Korean, Russian, Albanian, and Alaska Native students. By then the school had attracted a new principal, Sandy Stephens, previously supervisor of elementary special education. "In Sandy, we discovered we had hired a tireless worker who was able to galvanize the school," says Leonard Cestaro, a sixth-grade teacher who has seen Government Hill through all its changes.

Stephens, who had also been a Title I migrant supervisor, knew the school well, and she quickly took the lead in working with the committee. With their eyes on the prize —a second Title VII bilingual grant, plus a Title I grant for school-wide restructuring,—the committee met 30 times in the course of the year. "We did a mission statement, and goals and objectives for the school, so we would know where we've been, where we're going, and if we are achieving anything," Stephens says. She notes with pride that the planning process alone sparked change, and by the spring of the following year students' standardized test scores had already begun to rise.

The hard work of the committee, with the help of an excellent grantwriter, paid off in 1996 when Government Hill won a five-year, $1.2 million grant to realize its vision of rebuilding a school where all children would achieve academic excellence. Five key strategies for

change and academic revitalization were to:

- Eliminate the fragmentation of federal and state services that pulled targeted children (Title I, bilingual, migrant, Indian, gifted, and special ed) out of their classrooms, sometimes several times a day, and integrate academic services to children through the creation of instructional and tutoring teams
- Provide high-quality, ongoing professional development for all certified staff, paraprofessionals, and parents
- Promote academic achievement focusing on literacy and mathematics
- Foster bilingualism and biculturalism in all students
- Support parents as partners in the education of their children

With the new grant in place, Stephens turned her attention to the critical needs of the school: restructuring the classroom culture, developing creative and challenging curriculum that would meet district standards, recruiting staff, and providing ongoing professional development.

The creation of the international tutor position for each teaching team was central to the school's turnaround, according to Stephens, because it eliminated the practice of pulling students out of the classroom for special services. "Students need to be in the classroom and getting all the information that other children get, without missing out on anything," Stephens says emphatically. "If a child needs lower-level reading material, or a higher-level math lesson, we differentiate what we do within the classroom by modifying the regular curriculum." To pay for the new tutors (most speak Spanish, but one speaks Korean and another Tagalog), Stephens pooled state and federal money that would normally be used to hire separate specialists.

Curriculum development was another critical need. "In the beginning, we put in everything the district expected us to teach," says Stephens, "and then we decided what's important, and what's meeting standards. We don't have time, especially in the immersion program with two language arts blocks, to do that lesson on chocolate, for example, if it doesn't apply to anything else. Rather, we focus on making sure that what we teach is relevant, and hooking the kids in." Teaching teams meet regularly to craft and refine an immersion curriculum that is infused with the cultures of Spanish-speaking countries, and teachers in the neighborhood program develop curriculum that reflects the ethnic background of the student population.

"We've been doing a curriculum project for six years now," says

Kindergartners in Kim Leighton's class rush to grab a chance and extend the collection of stones.

Stephens, "and what's fun about it is that it's never going to be done. It's the process that's important."

FIVE HUNDRED STRONG

Today, Government Hill has almost 500 students: 325 in the dual-language program and 175 in the neighborhood school, and standardized test scores are in the top 10 schools in the district. Bridging the divide between the two programs remains a challenge, however, and will continue as long as high mobility and poverty affect low-income areas such as Government Hill. The district has begun to address the problem by initiating a district-community task force to explore what can be done to support families staying in place, at least through a school year. Looping two grades with the same teacher has also been effective, the district has found, because children are more engaged with school, and they pressure their parents not to move.

"There's no question the achievement gap has been narrowed at Government Hill," says Comeau, "and I think Sandy has done an incredibly good job of pooling and transforming all the state and federal programs into a coordinated, integrated model." Comeau continues cautiously, "This model can be duplicated, but it takes extra resources, and a staff committed to a vision and willing to stay put for awhile and really go through the struggle and challenges."

But beyond achievement and test scores, Government Hill has become a vital educational hub that invites visiting, participation, and commitment. It's a place where Leo's father stoops to hug Carlos in the hall, where Wyatt's grandmother volunteers five mornings a week, and where one sixth-grade teacher in the neighborhood school goes swimming on Saturdays with her students.

"I love the feel of this school," Stephens says. "In my old job I went around to the 61 elementary schools, and I know all schools do not feel the same. It was really important to me that this school feels good to everyone: parents, teachers, kids, and people from the community." □

NOTHING BUT THE BEST

At Grant Elementary, teachers expect their multiethnic students to strive for the top

Story by Joyce Riha Linik

Photos by Kathryn Stevens

SPOKANE, Washington—The singing, chanting, and juggling make Diane Stueckle's early-morning routine seem as much theatrical production as classroom warm-up. But the second-grade teacher's daily ritual is designed with the latest brain research in mind. Her objective: to bridge kids' *corpus callosum* (the connection between the right and left cerebral hemispheres), thus engaging and readying these second-grade brains for learning. The 20-minute warm-up includes a lively recitation—something like a pep-rally cheer—between teacher and her students:

Stueckle: "Are you smart?"
Students: "Yes."
Stueckle: "How smart are you?"
Students: "Very smart."
Stueckle: "What are you willing to give today?"
Students: "Nothing but the best."
Stueckle: "How do you treat an instructor?"
Students: "With respect."
Stueckle: "If someone tells you that you can't learn, what do you tell them?"
Students: "I determine what I can learn."
Stueckle: "How do you walk through life?"
Students: "With pride and confidence."
Stueckle: "What road are you on?"
Students: "The road to college."

Practiced every morning, these empowering thoughts are intended to take root in students' minds, enabling them to envision and reach for academic success, not just while they're in Stueckle's classroom, but in the years ahead. For these children, this message is especially important because it's one they might not otherwise get.

Paul Eide brings compassion and caring to his job teaching fifth grade at Grant Elementary School.

A richly diverse student population is making steady gains under a comprehensive plan for boosting achievement.

An urban school in a socioeconomically challenged neighborhood, Grant Elementary has a student population of 570 that is one of the most culturally diverse in the state. Kids represent a huge sampling of ethnic groups, including Afghani, African American, American Indian, Asian, Chinese, Hispanic, Hmong, Russian, and Ukrainian. More than 80 percent of the student body qualifies for free or reduced-price lunches. Sixteen percent are ESL students, many of them recent immigrants. The mobility rate currently stands at 30 percent.

Many of these students have difficult home lives. There are those being raised by single parents struggling to provide even the basic necessities. There are those being raised by grandparents while parents are serving time in prison or living in unknown locations. Some of Grant's children live in crowded apartments with extended families and multiple siblings. Some are forced into the role of caregiver themselves, left to tend younger brothers and sisters while their own guardians are at work.

It would be easy to explain and accept low scores by pointing out these harsh realities and citing the well-known link between poverty and poor academic performance. But teachers at Grant Elementary refuse to buy into that oft-bandied argument. "We're not going to make excuses for these children," says first-grade teacher Monica Lively. "We must be a driving force to getting these kids to succeed, no matter the environment they come from."

Adds Principal Steve Indgjerd: "Our staff has the belief that poverty does not determine intelligence. We need to do everything we can to help these kids succeed."

And, despite the formidable obstacles piled in their way, they *are* succeeding. In the past few years, student performance has risen steadily at Grant. Back in 1997, only 26 percent of Grant students passed the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in reading. By 1999, reading proficiency had risen to 46 percent. It jumped again in 2000 to 55 percent. The numbers in math, too, are impressive. Grant fourth-graders topped the district in the math portion of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) in 1999. It was the first time in eight years that a high-poverty school outperformed other schools in Spokane on the math test. In 2000, 52 percent of Grant students passed the math portion of the WASL, doubling their 1997 scores and beating both the state and district averages. As a testament to these steady gains, the U.S. Department of Education honored the school nationally as a Title I Distinguished School in 2001.

High Expectations

Grant's remarkable improvement has come about through a collaborative effort among school staff, parents, and community. It began in 1994–95 when an intensive needs assessment was conducted and, based on that data, a comprehensive schoolwide program developed to promote the success of every Grant student. Key elements of the program include setting high expectations for behavior and academic performance, providing early intervention services, and offering extended learning opportunities. "We use a variety of strategies to reach students," Indgjerd notes.

"A lot of these kids come in feeling they can't succeed," says Lively. "If you think a kid can't do it, they won't." The whole staff, she reports, "buys into the idea of high expectations and the belief that every one of these kids can succeed."

But to set the stage for success, teachers must take into account the special needs of these students. Safety is a big concern. Beyond the conflict, insecurity, and even violence that many of these kids encounter at home, the increasing danger in the wider world affects them emotionally, too. "These kids watch a lot of TV," Stueckle observes, "and they saw what happened on 9/11. These children are dealing with a lot."

As Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory points out, children will not be able to attain higher brain function until their basic life needs are met. "Unless they're fed, clothed, and safe," Stueckle says, "they can't learn. So my main concern is helping them to feel safe when they get here. They may not be safe at home or on the bus, but they know that when they get to school, they will be safe and they can learn."

Inevitably, a number of Grant students arrive with behavior problems rooted in anger, fear, and frustration. "These kids are coming from poverty and sometimes scary backgrounds," says Indgjerd. "They haven't had good models" to learn to deal with behavioral issues, "so we developed a schoolwide behavior plan where we teach them the necessary skills."

A few basic rules guide student behavior at Grant. Along with following directions and being where one is supposed to be, students are asked to become "self-managers"—that is, partners in their own learning, accountable for behaving in school and striving to be good students. When students demonstrate that they are effective self-managers (as more than 90 percent do), they earn the coveted self-manager badge and the privilege of qualifying for involvement in special activities. One such activity is

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Drummers and Dancers, a musical ensemble of third- through sixth-graders who sing, dance, and the play African drums. A longstanding symbol of cultural pride for the community, the group is frequently invited to perform at local, state, and even national events. Activities like this give kids a powerful incentive to stick to the straight and narrow where behavior is concerned.

The thrust of the behavior plan is "more positive than negative," says Indgjerd. "That's especially important for these kids." The idea is to build a system in which students are rewarded for learning new skills and practicing good behavior.

For those students who need extra help dealing with behavioral issues such as anger management, the Solutions Room offers them a place to get advice and counseling, as well as the opportunity to sit down at a "peace table" and work out conflicts with a mediator.

The fact that "all teachers have bought into the consequence procedure" is a good thing, says Stueckle. "This gives children an added sense of security in knowing that one teacher doesn't have a different standard than another."

Understanding and Support

To better understand their students' needs, a contingent of Grant staff members attended a seminar sponsored by the state education department focused on the ideas presented in the 1998 book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* by the nationally known educator and author Ruby Payne. Back at Grant, the 11 teachers and administrators guided the staff in a study of the book. Payne's book points out the "hidden rules" that govern how different social classes think and interact in society, as well as how this affects behavior in school. She goes on to suggest strategies to bridge the divides.

"It is helpful to understand their frame of reference," Stueckle says of her students and their families. "It makes us more cognizant and more sympathetic." For instance, Stueckle observes that parents don't always show up for conferences. Although the parents may want to be there, they may not show up because of transportation or child-care problems.

Indgjerd shares the anecdote of a student who stopped him in the hallway to tell him about something that had happened at home. Indgjerd listened attentively, but couldn't make much sense of the boy's tale. "The story had no beginning, middle, or end," the principal says. "Instead, it went in circles." Payne's book caused Indgjerd to suspect there was a cultural reason the boy didn't tell the story in sequence. In many families of poverty, according to Payne, several people typically talk at one time, interrupting each other and adding pieces to a story. The result is a story that progresses in a circular, rather than linear, fashion.

"Anything we can do to understand the families and their situation is critical," says fifth-grade teacher Paul Eide. For example, he says, "some students come in and are very loud and seem to want negative attention. That's characteristic of the poverty class. They learn to be loud because there is so much happening at home that they need to be loud to be heard. Or if a kid comes to school without paper and pencil," he adds, "you don't make a big deal out of it. Some kids have a really rough home life so they need support in school. They need to feel like everything is going to be OK and that

they have a shoulder to lean on."

Teachers at Grant offer their students a great deal of support and positive encouragement. They know that these students need to believe that their teachers care about them and that what they're doing in school has relevance in the world. These messages are especially important to these at-risk children because they may not be getting academic support or encouragement at home.

"The relationship is key," says Lively. She remembers a veteran teacher once advising her, "The first thing is to get them to love you because, if they love you, they'll do anything for you." Sometimes, she says, when a child arrives below grade level at the beginning of the year, "that child has to do more than a year's work during the year. They're not going to do it if they think the teacher doesn't care."

Stueckle says she asks herself, "How do I make them love to be here every day?" The answer, she insists, is to make learning fun and to offer them lots of positive reinforcement. She tells her students, "We're going to work hard, but we're going to have fun." Additionally, she says, "I make sure they feel success." Stueckle makes her way around the room, giving kudos to individual kids who have found the right answer or used the right approach. She also praises them for taking initiative in their learning — for example, consulting the dictionary for spelling or clarification during research on a project.

Multiple Approaches

To ensure that every child learns, Indgjerd says, "we need to look at every child individually and assess each one's needs." As a result, Grant teachers monitor students throughout the school year to gauge where they are on the learning continuum and where they need to go. Assessments, tied to state and district learning goals, are conducted at the beginning and end of the school year from kindergarten through sixth grade. Additionally, teachers conduct classroom-based assessments throughout the year to identify areas of need for both individuals and the class as a whole. These frequent assessments assist the staff in monitoring student progress, measuring instructional effectiveness, and setting goals for improving instruction.

"Even at first grade," Lively says, "kids are at such different levels. It makes my job trickier." To keep track of student progress, Lively tries to meet frequently with each student. Additionally, each child keeps a spiral notebook to record daily notes about his or her reading experience. Lively then reviews the notebooks to see where her students need assistance. "It's difficult to keep track of 22 students," she says, "but that's part of being a good teacher. And these students need and deserve good teachers."

At Grant, staff members employ multiple ways of teaching to be sure they're reaching all students. Teachers like Stueckle make use of recent brain research to differentiate instruction and create learning opportunities for students of varied learning styles. Additionally, all teachers report using a variety of independent and cooperative learning approaches in the classroom.

"Sometimes," Stueckle observes, "students make the biggest strides when they are working together." She shares the story of Khou, an ESL student who spoke Hmong at home and wasn't very comfortable with either English or social interaction in school. "Khou was quiet and withdrawn and shy," Stueckle says. "But working with a partner helped her blossom and become a leader instead of a follower. She's gotten louder, more confident. Now, when she knows the answer, her hand is up high, waving in place. She's feeling good about herself, talking more, laughing." Because many of these kids need help learning social as well as academic skills, group work can offer multiple advantages, Stueckle notes.

Recognizing the importance of literacy skills for their at-risk population, Grant instructors work extremely hard to develop accomplished readers. Indgjerd reports that staff members use "lots of strategies to teach literacy" and are always looking for ways to improve literacy instruction. Particularly helpful, he says, has been a book called *Mosaic of Thought* by Ellin Keene and Susan Zimmerman, which suggests strategies for teaching reading comprehension. Additionally, the staff is committed to providing early intervention for any student experiencing difficulties.

"A lot of these kids don't come from literate homes," observes Eide. "People aren't sitting down and reading. They don't have that modeling at home." As a result, Eide opens up large blocks of time for reading and writing and tries to help his students "make connections — to themselves, to the world, to other texts. This makes a huge difference," he says, "when it comes to comprehension." In a recent unit, Eide introduced his students to biographies of famous African Americans, pointing out the struggles and achievements of such notables as Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King. He hopes some of his students will feel a connection to these figures, perhaps identifying with their struggles to overcome

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adversity. Eide attempts to offer his students minority role models other than the professional athletes and musicians that so many children idolize. He hopes to show his students that "reading is the road out" of poverty.

Lively notes that her first-grade students arrive at school with "a lack of oral language. They haven't been given much opportunity to converse," she says, "to talk or be talked to. And in order to understand written language, they have to be masters of oral language." So Lively gives them opportunities to speak in class. Additionally, she says, "many of these kids don't have the life experiences that other kids have. And if you haven't had much experience beyond the four walls of your house or your neighborhood, it's difficult to draw connections to what you're reading." For this reason, Lively plans educational field trips throughout the year—to a children's theater production, for example, or to a fish hatchery, or even to a local pet store. This gives students common experiences to talk and write about. Additionally, it awakens an interest in reading because students return to school anxious to learn more about what they have just seen.

According to Indgjerd and other teachers, much of the credit for Grant's impressive test results in mathematics belongs to one staff member. Karen Yamamoto, a veteran teacher with more than 30 years of experience, was originally enlisted to work with struggling math students on a pull-out basis. When those students' performance rose above other students', people took notice, and she became math specialist for the entire school.

While teachers employ math textbooks aligned with state and district learning goals, they also rely heavily on Yamamoto's approach to teaching math. She moves throughout the building, guiding some teachers in math instruction and team teaching with others. Her traveling show includes a stuffed sidekick, the popular monkey Curious George, and a bag of tricks to help students get a fix on math patterns and find solutions to problems. One such trick, called "Granny Subtract," helps students solve subtraction problems by envisioning a scenario where Curious George needs to travel "x" number of blocks from home to Granny's house. But his mother—a working mom whom the kids can identify with—can only drive him partway. The students have to figure out how many blocks are left to travel to Granny's house—or to the bank two blocks past Granny's or to the grocery store two blocks beyond that. This fun, practical approach "works for students," says Yamamoto. So do her procedures for identifying numeric patterns and solving math problems. Even skeptical teachers have eventually been won over by her approach.

"We start out concrete, often using manipulatives," says Yamamoto, "then go abstract." Additionally, she says, "We try to teach strategies so that students can do problems and self-correct their own work."

Because of Yamamoto's coaching, Stueckle says, "We use the same terminology and concepts throughout the school." This benefits students. "Consistency and collaboration," she says, "have been key to helping students at Grant succeed."

Grant offers a multitude of programs to support students' learning. In fact, the list of extra educational programs and support groups reads something like a Chinese menu with a dizzying array of choices. There is the After-School Homework Center where K–6 students can tackle schoolwork or get tutoring. The Literacy Center provides one-to-one tutoring for second- and third-graders who need help with reading. Lunch Bunch offers students the chance to build their math skills by playing educational computer games in the technology lab at lunchtime. The Technology and Annual Club allows fifth- and sixth-grade students to receive training in the use of digital cameras, scanners, computers, and software graphics programs. Mentoring programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters offer needy kids additional attention and support. There are ESL, Title I, special education, and Reading Recovery specialists on staff to work with students in need.

"We can't change their home life or their economic status," says Lively, "but we can create an environment to help them succeed." □

Taking Care of Business

A strong work ethic keeps three top students at "Jeff" moving toward their goals despite the tribulations of their struggling urban high school

Story by LEE SHERMAN, photos by DENISE JARRETT WEEKS

PORTLAND, Oregon—When researchers go in search of big trends, underlying causes, or overarching theories, the individual student is often reduced to a hatch mark on a tally sheet. To give our readers a glimpse behind the statistics, a trio of hard-working sophomores agreed to share their perspective on life at Jefferson High School in Portland's inner city. As one of the metro area's most troubled schools, Jeff was "reconstituted" a couple of years ago—a new administration took over, the teaching staff was revamped, the curriculum was infused with new rigor. Now, staff and students are working mightily to rebuild their once-proud performing arts magnet.

Each of the three students interviewed here has found the inner drive to set and achieve his or her academic goals. They offer their outlook with intelligence, humor, honesty, and hope. The sophomore English and journalism teacher, who has just finished his second year at Jefferson, joined the conversation. Meet Shawntena Norman, Lamar Franklin, Bayo Arigbon, and Andrew Kulak:

Shawntena Norman: A lifelong Portland resident, Shawntena has followed her three older sisters through some of the city's most troubled schools. As a child, she experienced a lot of upheaval—"moving back and forth, here and there," often staying with her grandmother who, she says, "would always make a little spot" for her. "It's been tough, but it's cool," says the African American sophomore, who spends a lot more time focused on the future than the past. With one sister attending Alabama State University, Shawntena has set her sights on being the next collegian in the family. She's pulling up her grades and participating in the school performing arts program, where she recently brought her acting and singing talents to the stage in a production of *Hair*.

Lamar Franklin: Raised mainly in Anchorage, Lamar fooled around a lot in middle school, pulling D's and F's, not really caring. But when the family moved to Portland last year, the young man with Samoan ancestry decided it was time to hit the books. In spite of shifting family ties (his mom moved on to California for a job, leaving Lamar and his older brother in Portland with their stepfather), he achieved a 4.0 in his freshman year at Jefferson. He says: "I miss my mom, but, you know, I still got to take care of business." He likes math and is considering a career in engineering.

Bayo Arigbon: As the youngest of five siblings, Bayo grew up mostly in Portland (with a short stint in Stockton, California) with his mom and dad. This African-American student is proud of the top grades he's been pulling in high school, plus he sees the practical slant to doing well—scoring a scholarship to college. With an interest in computers, math, and business, Bayo aspires to become an entrepreneur, so that he can work for himself, make his own hours, basically "be the boss." In a tightly contested race, Bayo was elected president of the student council for the 2002–2003 school year.

Andrew Kulak: The son of educators, Andy Kulak knew early on that he would teach in the city. But this young teacher of European American lineage (Irish and Polish) wanted to pursue his calling in the multiethnic classrooms of a public school rather than in the cloistered environment of a private school like Jesuit-run St. Ignatius, the high school he attended in downtown Chicago. He taught in a suburban area of Michigan before following his heart to the city of Portland two years ago.

NORTHWEST EDUCATION (to the youths): Think back on your elementary school years. Did you have a favorite teacher?

SHAWNTENA: I did. Her name was Miss Heidelberg. She was my day-care teacher. Then she was my third-grade teacher, my fifth-grade teacher, she just always ended up being my teacher. She moved when I moved.

NW: What did you like about her?

SHAWNTENA: She was strict, but she was cool. And I knew her real good.

NW: What do you mean when you say "cool"? What makes a teacher cool?

SHAWNTENA: One who can relate, who understands, who kinda on your level, as a kid. Just down-to-earth, kinda.

LAMAR: There was one teacher in my third grade that was real strict. Her name was Miss Richardson. For some reason I just liked her teaching, you know, it was balanced out and relaxed, and she made us stay on track and everything.

BAYO: My fifth-grade teacher was pretty good. She was nice, but she could be mean. We would get projects, they would be, like, real fun, but we would be learning, too. And she gave out candy. *(They laugh.)*

NW: How was she mean?

BAYO: She was strict, you know. I guess it was her making sure everybody got, like, ahead.

NW: These teachers you remember—were they African American?

LAMAR: Mine was African American.

SHAWNTENA: Mine, too.

BAYO: White.

NW: This is a big debate among the researchers—how important is it for kids of different ethnic backgrounds to have teachers from the same background so that they understand their culture and serve as role models? I'm hearing you say that this is important, but that there are other important considerations as well.

LAMAR: Kids want someone to relate to. Like if you can understand a kid, be their friend *and* their teacher, then I think that kids would learn more and be easier to teach.

NW: What do you think about Mr. Kulak here?

BAYO: I can't stand him. *(They all laugh.)* No.

SHAWNTENA: Good teacher. Makes it interesting.

BAYO: He's fun, and he's nice, too. One thing that stands out is that when we did our vocabulary in English class last year (with a different teacher), it was just like, here's your words, and you got to take your responsibility, study them, and everything. I did the studying, and then my mind would be blank on the test. The way Mr. Kulak does it, you know, I still remember some of the words if I see them in the books we read. If we have a vocabulary word, we write it down and we write the meaning and then we draw a picture. If you don't know the meaning right off the bat, you can just look at the picture and you'll know, because you're the one who drew the picture.

SHAWNTENA: It's like visual learning.

LAMAR: I heard Mr. Kulak is a really good teacher. I talked to some other kids about that book, *Macbeth* —you know, Destin, he's like, "You should get Mr. Kulak, it's fun reading a book with him." Yeah, I wanted to have his class, but I never got that opportunity.

NW: What do kids like about him?

LAMAR: He's fun.

NW: But at the same time I think I'm hearing you guys say that you want to be challenged, you don't want a teacher to just come in and be your buddy.

LAMAR: Yeah. But then it's good to have that relationship, too, you know what I'm saying?

NW: But reading *Macbeth* is tough. That's a college-level work of literature. *(To Kulak)* How do you approach *Macbeth* in a way that kids can relate to?

KULAK: We talked about Shakespeare as a person at that time in history. And we watched a documentary, Al Pacino's *Looking for Richard*, to get a sense of how people who work with Shakespearean actors approach this and how they struggle with it. Even people in the movies who've made all this money and are very successful still have these issues with trying to understand these words. Then when we came to *Macbeth*, it was about breaking it down. So first we looked at who the characters were, and then we looked at the scenes where things were going to be happening. We built journals together—converting things into your own words, your own interpretation, and also keeping track of words that were new to you and what context they were in, what do they mean. We have people reading with partners right now, and then they have dialogue about what they've read. I'm floating around and answering questions. There's a lot of self-discovery that happens. At the same time, I have my objectives as a teacher, and I want to see them met.

NW (to Kulak): Did you have any trepidation about coming to a school with a student population that's almost 85 percent minority?

KULAK: Not the slightest. This is the one school I wanted to work at in Portland, so I was very pleased.

NW: Why did you want to work at Jeff?

KULAK: My father taught in Chicago Public Schools, and he would take me with him and I liked the schools he worked in. The energy was very different from the (private) schools I went to. To me, it was more of what high school energy was supposed to be. I always knew I wanted to work in a city school with a diverse population, and not in a suburban school or a private school where it would seem a lot more oppressive to me.

NW: I'm sure you are all very aware of some of the recent protests to the school board by the Education Crisis Team—the community members who are concerned about low performance at a number of schools in low-income neighborhoods. Jefferson is one of those schools. Do you feel that the education you're getting here is of high quality?

SHAWNTENA: Actually, I do. I think we have some really good teachers here. Students are trying to improve their test scores and prepare for higher education.

LAMAR: Yeah, like this year I have Mr. Johnson for English. He's real tough. We're doing speeches, essays, college stuff. First quarter I struggled to get a B. Next quarter I got a high B. And last quarter, I finally got an A in his class. He's a really good teacher. He challenges us a lot.

NW: Do some kids get discouraged by the level of difficulty?

LAMAR: Yes, there are kids that moved out after the first quarter. They felt they couldn't do that class. Other students that started to make good grades, like me, stayed in the class and now everybody got used to it. Everybody in the class right now is hard working.

NW: What about the kids who choose to drop out?

BAYO: You see them all the time. They just be outside talking and stuff like that. But you don't see them in school, so you just put two and two together—maybe he dropped out, or how many years has he been a senior? or something like that. *(Laughter.)* I just continue to do my work so that won't happen to me.

LAMAR: There's a couple of people that want you to skip school. But I feel like if you want to achieve, graduate, go to college, it's not so hard to do your work, come to school. That's basically what you've got to do, take care of that.

BAYO: There's people that want to do good, they just need that person to say, "Not this time, let's go to class." They need that person to force them to do their work if they're at home.

NW: Do you have that person at home?

BAYO: No. *(They laugh.)* But I still do my work.

LAMAR: I would just say that some people don't have that person to guide them and give them that push and be a positive role model.

NW: Who's your role model?

LAMAR: I don't really have one. But I just look at everything that's going on around me, and I don't want to be a bum. I want to go to college.

NW: Shawntena, do you have someone at home encouraging you?

SHAWNTENA: Actually, no. But I know what I have to do.

NW: Researchers suggest that some minority kids worry that if they try hard in school and get good grades, their friends will criticize them for "acting white." Have you heard that term and do you hear that attitude—that succeeding in school is a bad thing because it's a rejection of your own culture to try to be successful in the dominant culture?

LAMAR: What you're saying is, "Have I ever heard other people say that we're acting white 'cause we're trying to succeed in life?" I never heard of that saying. And if I heard it, it would probably never bother me. I heard, like, if you're doing your work and getting good grades, they call you a "dork" or something.

SHAWNTENA: I think right now that we, as African American students or whatever, that is showing some progress, it's not like we are trying to act white; it's just that we are starting to realize more, I guess, to take it seriously. And I wouldn't necessarily say "acting white" because there's a lot of African Americans out there doing the same stuff right now that other cultures are doing. We're starting to rise, if that's what you want to call it. So that's an accomplishment. We see what other people are doing—for example, Halle Berry and Denzel Washington winning the Oscars. So it's making us want to do more in life—if they can do it, we can do it.

NW (to Kulak): Have you observed a change in student attitudes toward achievement since you arrived?

KULAK: I've noticed a very significant change in the school this year over the last year. One of the things I see is leadership. Last year we lost a principal, and prior to that we had

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gone through a couple of principals, and it has a drastic effect on how we communicated to the students as a whole. This year, Jim Carlile was our interim principal, and he did a marvelous job. I know teachers felt a lot more comfortable knowing there was this solidity in the building. I think it helps the teachers communicate better with kids. It's happening on a subconscious level, but it's very much there. As far as the students go, last year I noticed in my classes more students choosing to go into alternative ed or Job Corps or something else. This year, that's down significantly. What I personally am doing differently is keeping my students aware of what's happening in the press and how the media are portraying our school in terms of test scores. And I tell them how numbers don't really reflect the kind of learning and the strength and integrity of students in the building. And I think that has an effect, as well.

NW: Will the interim principal return next year?

KULAK: No. He only came in for one year. A new principal was hired, Larry Dashiell. He has worked in this building before, lives in the community, African American man, and has years as an administrator, not as a principal but as a VP.

NW: You said that it made a big difference having somebody who was able to provide "solidity" in the school. How important is it to have the right principal as the leader in the school?

KULAK: Earlier in my career I never thought it was that important, something I took for granted. I didn't see the disarray that can be caused when a principal doesn't have it happening on all the levels, or the administrative duties aren't spread out evenly enough so that it is an overload. I think that the solidity is one of those things that when it's working, you know it's working because everything else is running smoothly. But when it's not working, it's pandemonium, it's chaos. There are too many people who are feeling their needs are not being met within the building. It's strange, because I could not outline for you the things that the principal does, but I do know when it's working.

NW: Have you met the new principal yet, Bayo?

BAYO: No. I still have to set up a meeting with him about the bell schedule. I don't want it to change, and I came up with a third-party idea to present to him. It's good, too. I was speaking to the teachers, and they seemed like their strongest argument is they want to see the students for, like, the whole year. So I was thinking how they can do that —see the students through for the whole year —and us still have the 85-minute block.

KULAK (explains to the interviewer): The plan is to do a modified block of 55 and 90 minutes. So you would have 90-minute classes on two days of the week and then 55-minute classes the other three days.

BAYO: I didn't like that. I like the 85 minutes because, like, some of the time you pick up the assignment real quick and you can just start doing it. And then some of the time, you don't pick up the assignment quick. And it takes longer for the teacher to explain to the student how to do it the right way. That takes time, and if you got only 55 minutes some of the time, you are going to be rushed and not know what to do. You are going to leave without a full understanding, and that's going to be bad. That is just one of the arguments. I don't want to give away my political secrets. We got to set up a meeting.

NW: Do you have a group of kids who want to meet with him?

BAYO: It's a group on the student council.

NW: You all seem really hopeful about the future. Do you have other friends who think, "Well, it's not going to do me any good to work hard in school, because there's nothing out there for me"?

LAMAR: I had a friend who went here last year with us and he was real smart, you know. He was real good in reading and in math, everything. For some reason, this year he stopped coming to school and when we asked him why, he was, like, "I just don't think it's worth it," or something. So now he's at home and he just sits there, but he reads a lot. I visit his house, and there are stacks of books, but then I was, like, "You can do that at school and learn more stuff, you know." But it is just weird to see him. It's a shame.

NW: So he hasn't said anything specific about why he felt school wasn't worth his time?

LAMAR: He had told me that his brother didn't graduate from high school, but now he got a good job. So maybe he figures that, you know, he can drop out of high school and get a real good job. But I thought it was better to get your education.

SHAWNTENA: Well, I have a lot of friends that are really smart. One friend went here last year, too, and she doesn't go here anymore. She always got good grades. But now, it's, like, a money thing to her. She has to have money all the time. She is one of them, "In school, I'm not making no money; so I'm gonna not go (to school) and make some money." So then you got the girls that's getting pregnant. Some of the

girls do make it. Some of them have this child and are still going to school and maybe have a good job. And then there's some that just don't, they're struggling. But that's what they chose, so you can't really say too much about it. It's really sad to me. Then I know a lot of people that go to alternative schools, and it will be, like, you're going the easy route. I mean, it's cool you are still going to school, but you're not challenging yourself enough to really make it in life.

NW: Is there anything you'd change about school to help kids be more successful?

BAYO: I think they should, like, make it more convenient, start a little bit later. That would take care of tardies. Then you could have SSR (silent sustained reading) for *everybody*. That gives them a chance to read and catch up in the book. Like now, only certain teachers do it in English. And it seems like when students don't want to learn, the teachers are taking a lot of time to try to get them to learn. And while this is happening, other people need help. So the teachers just need to, like, "If you don't want to learn today, there's a whole bunch of other people who do want to learn." If they don't want to learn, just let 'em be.

KULAK: I would like to add to the previous statement about attributing increasing success to the SSR program that the English teachers started two years ago here. I think this is making a tremendous difference—I think it is paramount for increasing literacy skills so that students can read many different things and gain information on their own, detect biases, and all of that. I think that is a large part of what more successful teachers here are doing. As far as changing things, what I see as the most important thing is to cultivate that spark of ability. What I would like to see is a way for students to develop that inner voice, that internal motivation that tells them, "I want to be here, I need to be here."

BAYO: You talk to people from different schools and they put Jeff down. They say, "Well, Jeff is easy, you *should* be getting those grades if you go to Jeff." And they say, "Well, it's real easy, and you guys *still* get low ratings in the state." I think schools need to reflect more of everything, not just testing. I think that's wrong to stereotype the school because all schools are the same—school is school. School is what you make it. If people want to go to school, they are going to get it right, but if people *don't* want to go to school and they don't want to pay attention, then it's gonna show up. It can happen at any school. It's just the work ethic that people have. □

"The Way We See It"

A number of promising notions for strengthening schools are embedded in the conversation with Jefferson High School sophomores Shawntena Norman, Lamar Franklin, and Bayo Arigbon, and their English teacher Andrew Kulak. Here's a distillation of key ideas:

- The "best" teachers blend "strictness" (high expectations) with "understanding" (the ability to relate to kids with empathy and humor)
- Learning is more lasting when teachers provide multiple avenues for absorbing the material (verbal, written, visual)
- High expectations and challenging curriculum inspire students to push themselves toward excellence
- Strong building leadership is critical to creating a cohesive school community that supports top-notch teaching and learning
- Block scheduling helps students to gain greater understanding of material and form caring relationships with teachers
- Daily silent sustained reading in high school boosts literacy skills (such as reading for information and detecting biases) and helps kids keep up in class
- Opportunities to demonstrate achievement should go well beyond taking standardized tests
- Students' work ethic must be cultivated as the driving force that will ultimately keep them moving forward

LETTERS

COMPASSION, NOT PRISON

I would like to thank you for your issue on causes and prevention of youth-perpetrated violence ("Learning in Peace: Schools Look Toward a Safer Future," Spring 1999"). I think many people have been aware of the emotional problems caused by bullying and poor family situations in adolescents, but it seems that only recently, in the wake of the school shooting tragedies, has anyone decided to take responsibility for these children instead of condemning them as monsters.

I wholeheartedly believe that the children who commit these acts are the victims of situations that are out of their control. Children are not able to defend themselves from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect. Perhaps most important, they are not able to replicate within themselves the values and love that come from having family, friends, or other supportive persons who care for them and teach them that they are valuable and lovable themselves. If a person, based on abuse and neglect in his formative years, perceives the world as dangerous and filled with enemies, and if he has no basis of love for himself and others, how can he be expected to react in a "normal" way to other members of society—especially those who confirm that individual's pessimistic worldview? It is easy to see how, in a dark void of pain, merciless teasing, isolation, and fear, an individual with no hope of a better existence and no relative concept of love and support to buoy him through hardship could make the decision to terminate the life of himself and others.

These youth do not need to be incarcerated, where they will blend with hardened and callused adult murderers; they need to be in a therapeutic setting where they can learn to love and trust. The adolescents who survive their burst of violence, their cry for help, are more often than not extremely remorseful for the lives they have taken. They are shortly thereafter able to recognize the depressive state that led to their explosion, and want to remedy their situation. These are not the kinds of individuals who repeat their crimes. I strongly believe that with help and love, these young people can overcome their tragic past and begin to heal their lives and hearts.

Thank you for your efforts to help these youths and to prevent these tragedies from occurring again.

Jennifer Holcom
Teacher and homeschool mom
Warsaw, Indiana

LIGHTING THE WAY

The Alisha Moreland article ("Shined by the City," Winter 1999) really touched me in a special way, since I was one of her many classmates at Jefferson High School. Alisha is so bright and outstanding and I am truly honored to say that I walked across the same stage at the same ceremony as her. I am glad that this article is available for everyone to see how special she is.

Excellent article!

Tanesha Chiles-McCray
Dental assistant and
dental hygiene student
Highline Community College
Des Moines, Washington

NOT JUST "EXTRAS"

Even though I am responding to an old issue ("Opening Doors to Latchkey Kids," Spring 1999), the concern is still the same in the year 2002. There is the continued emphasis upon only those areas considered to be academic, with a devaluation of areas such as physical education, music, art, and the humanities. I am pleased to see that your organization has spent time in researching and providing information to the fact that all of these areas contribute greatly to academic success.

It is my hope that your organization might provide this information to superintendents and administrators around the country. The amazing fact is that we struggle to raise test scores, we continue to add more and more academics, and yet valuable help lies right within our midst. What always gets cut are the areas that could help to reverse the trend.

Again, thank you for being a source of encouragement for what I do. There's not much going around in the school systems.

Jane Collins
Physical Education Teacher
Longfellow Elementary School
Columbia, Maryland

VOICE-ACTIVATED EQUITY

My son Adam just completed his senior project today, a requirement for graduation. His topic, which he spent the entire senior year researching and preparing for, was computer assisted literacy ("Forget Isolation, We're Online Now," Winter 2000). He showed how voice activated software can assist students with learning disabilities—how vital a role it can play toward giving all kids a level playing field and opportunity to be able to express themselves.

As his mother, I can only say that this was a very appropriate topic to send him off into adulthood. My son has dyslexia, and I have been his scribe and his reader since second grade.

It has been a very long and lonely path for my son but none-the-less very challenging for us both. In the end, my son learned that he is an expert in a field that most know little about. He has taken it upon himself to educate teachers so that they may be able to reach out to other learning disabled kids and offer solutions.

Thanks for this beautiful article.

Kim Disbury
Grant Writer/Researcher
Gig Harbor, Washington

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Watch for coming issues

Winter issue
Focus on Writing: With a Special Report on the Six-Trait Model

Spring issue
Back From the Brink: Saving Kids With Learning Disabilities From Failure

Summer issue
Discovery Learning: Lessons From Lewis and Clark

You are invited to send us article ideas,
identify places where good things are happening,
provide descriptions of effective techniques being used,
suggest useful resources, and submit letters to the editor.

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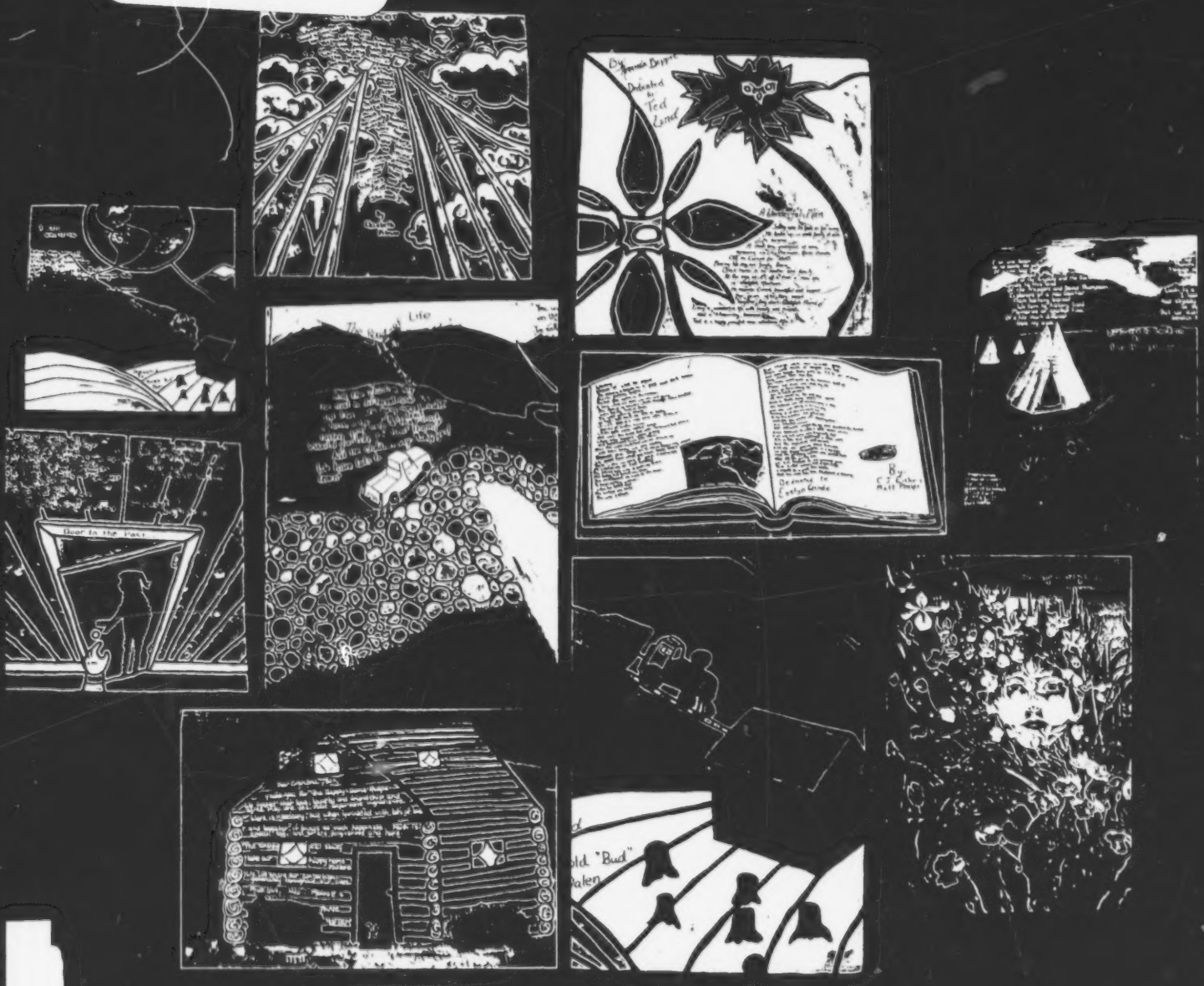

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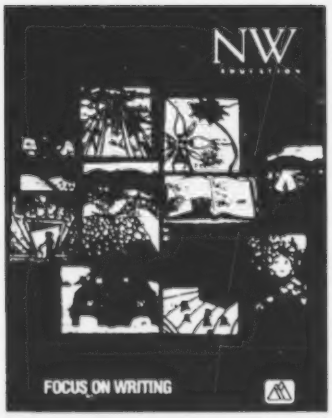

ON THE COVER:
In the Flathead Valley of Montana, students have combined writing with visual images to create a series of community murals that celebrate local history. "Life Studies," a story about the Mural Poetry Project, begins on Page 12.
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SUZIE BOSS

Focus on Writing

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36 In the Library

SPECIAL SECTION on 6+1 Trait™ Model of writing assessment begins after Page 36.

A small-town newspaper in a San Francisco suburb gave me my first break as a writer. I was 15 and a bit on the nerdy side—the only girl in an advanced math class, an aspiring student journalist, and a jock at a time when girls were expected to "glow, not sweat." At the end of a winning tennis season, our coach pointed out that, while our all-girl team had gone undefeated, we had yet to receive any ink in the local newspaper. Meanwhile, the boy's football team dominated the headlines, loss after loss. Her words inspired me to knock on the editor's door and ask for more balanced coverage. His response: Why don't you cover girls' sports for us? He even offered to pay me—25 cents per column inch. Waving the thick black pencil used for editing back in those days before desktop publishing, he cautioned against padding for the sake of extra bucks. In a few curt sentences, he laid out his rules to live by: Write tight. Meet your deadlines. And never spell a name wrong. I've heard plenty of other advice about writing since then, but those early lessons still ring true.

Lasting lessons about writing are the focus of this issue of *Northwest Education*. We've approached the subject from a variety of perspectives, drawing insights from researchers, classroom teachers, and professional authors. You'll find examples of student writing woven throughout this issue, too.

A section called "Ideas Worth Borrowing" gathers great classroom ideas, ranging from whimsical projects that use storybook characters and fairy tales to inspire young writers to ambitious publishing projects that use writing to connect students with the world beyond the classroom. In "Keepin' It Real," a remarkable teacher named Erin Gruwell shares her experience of coaching a group of students who call themselves the Freedom Writers. They've harnessed words instead of weapons to make a difference in the world. In an article called "What They Remember," professional writers reminisce about their own classroom writing experiences—for better or worse.

This issue also includes a special section about the 6+1 Trait™ Writing Assessment and Instruction Model. Developed by Northwest teachers to provide students with useful feedback about key aspects of their writing, the model has spread to every state and many other countries. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory has developed a variety of tools and publications to help teachers use the traits to promote better student writing. We highlight some new products along with some old favorites.

What gets your students excited about writing? As always, we invite you to share your ideas and feedback with other readers of *Northwest Education*.

—*Suzie Boss*

Permanent Ink

Learning to write is a lesson that lasts a lifetime. But what brings out the best in young writers?

Story by SUZIE BOSS
Photo by DENISE JARRETT WEEKS

The visiting author had his audience of writing teachers in thrall as he explained what he called "unpacking a scene." Go for detail, he urged. Don't just write about someone entering a room and slumping into a chair. Paint each movement in words so that readers can see the character framed in the doorway, watch him make his way across the room. Let readers hear the chair slide against the floorboards and squeak with the weight of the character settling in.

A veteran teacher interrupted the hum of agreement coming from his colleagues. "If one of my kids wrote that a character slumped into a chair, I'd be elated," he said. "*Slumping* would be a big deal."

And there it was—the challenge that writing teachers face every day. How to take students from where they are now to where they might go as writers? How to help them use all the tools at their disposal to communicate, to argue, to explain, to connect?

According to the *Nation's Report Card on Writing* issued by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, most students still have far to go in reaching their potential as writers. The most recent report card, released in 1999, showed that most students have met the "basic" level of writing achievement. However, only a minority of students—23 percent of fourth-graders, 27 percent of eighth-graders, and 22 percent of 12th-graders—have advanced to the "proficient" level of achievement. Only 1 percent of students performed at the highest achievement level, which NAEP defines as "advanced."

During the past decade, researchers and practitioners have focused on writing instruction as a subject deserving a closer look. Several forces have been at work: Teachers have worked hard to define what good writing looks like and how to give students useful feedback to improve their skills. The standards movement has prompted many states to define what writing instruction should accomplish and how to measure student progress toward meeting goals. The National Writing Project has emerged as a model of professional development that helps teachers become more effective writing coaches. Meanwhile, desktop publishing and the World Wide Web have created new opportunities for students to share their best work with audiences outside the classroom. And many schools

routinely open their doors to professional writers, creating opportunities for them to "unpack" the tricks of their trade for the benefit of students and teachers alike.

PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

Writers know more fully what they mean only after having written it.

—Sondra Perl

Although good writing instruction cannot be reduced to a formula, certain practices are apt to be found in a classroom where students are honing their craft and becoming confident writers. In particular, research shows that young writers improve their skills when they learn that writing is a process involving review and revision. Many students also work harder at writing when they see that their work reaches an audience and serves a real purpose—something more authentic than meeting a due date.

According to NEAP, students achieve higher writing scores when their teachers:

- Ask them to plan their writing in class
- Save their work in folder or portfolio
- Require them to write more than one draft
- Talk to them about what they were writing
- Use computers for writing and revision

NAEP also has found that parents can help to boost students' writing skills by discussing classroom studies with their children and making reading materials available at home. (See sidebar at left.)

What's the sum of these parts? Longtime researcher George Hillocks Jr. asserts that effective writing instruction encourages students to think. "In the past 30 years," he writes in his 2002 book, *The Testing Trap: How State Writing Assessments Control Learning*, "researchers and theorists have come to know that teaching writing entails teaching thinking." Being able to write well is a lifelong skill, but it's essential to the work of learning. As Hillocks points out, "people learn through writing. Putting the ideas on the word processor or on paper clarifies them and enables us to think through what we really mean."

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

When he was a sickly first-grader, Stephen King stayed home for most of a school year to recuperate. He read a lot of comic books and tried his hand at writing. His mother inspired him to quit copying "funnybooks" and write some stories of his own. When he did, she rewarded him with praise he still remembers. As he relates in *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*: "She said it was good enough to be in a book. Nothing anyone has said to me since has made me feel any happier."

Not every kid will grow up to write blockbusters, of course, but parents can play an important role in inspiring and encouraging their children to become writers. The National Council of Teachers of English encourages parents to "build a climate of words at home. The basis of good writing is good talk," NCTE points out in an online guide for parents (www.ncte.org/positions/how-to-help.shtml).

Similarly, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement offers pointers for parents:

- Provide a place to write and plenty of writing materials.
- Help your child spend time thinking about a writing project or exercise.
- Respond to your young writer's work. Focus more attention on *what* the child has written and less on the mechanics or fine points of grammar. And say something positive.
- Don't write *for* your child. Don't rewrite his or her work. Instead, help by brainstorming.
- Encourage your child to keep a journal.
- Write together. Let your child see that writing is important to adults, too.

A TIMELINE: FROM PRODUCT TO PROCESS

I love getting up every morning and mucking around in sentences, playing with stories, trying to build my city of words.

—Ralph Fletcher

Forty years ago, a landmark report commissioned by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) lambasted the state of writing instruction. Authors of the 1963 Braddock Report found "... the field as a whole is laced with dreams, prejudices, and makeshift operations."

Hillocks, who conducted a meta-analysis of research on writing instruction in 1983, suggests that most teachers never learned how to teach writing. "Teachers of English in the secondary schools have little or no training in the teaching of writing. They are, after all, graduates of English departments concentrating on literature," he points out in *The Testing Trap*. "Elementary and middle school language arts teachers tend to have even less background in writing. They have tended to concentrate on reading."

The field of writing instruction has evolved during the decades since the Braddock Report. The 1970s and 1980s saw teachers taking a cue from how writers approach their craft. The writing process began to take hold as an effective way to teach writing. The process approach encourages students to shape their writing through a series of stages, typically including brainstorming or prewriting, drafting, revising (often with benefit of feedback from teacher or peers), editing, and publishing.

By 1988, when Kathleen Cotton of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory took another look at research on writing instruction, she found student achievement to be higher when teachers emphasized writing as a *process* rather than written work as a *product*. In what she called "product-oriented teaching," teachers had focused on form and correctness, and "the student has to get it right the first time because the paper turned in will be the only version." In contrast, the stages of the writing process are "more in keeping with the true nature of the act of writing," Cotton concluded.

By the early 1990s, writing teachers were creating another tool to improve instruction. Giving students a single score to assess their writing reflected the old product approach to teaching. An "A" grade might make a young writer proud, but it wouldn't point out what was good about the work and what could be better. Similarly, a low grade would tell the student his work wasn't up to par, but would offer no guidance for improvement on the next draft. Working collaboratively, writing teachers began to develop analytical scoring tools for evaluating different aspects of student writing. (A special section about the 6+1 Trait™ Writing Model begins after Page 36).

NEW ROLE FOR TEACHER

Write only from experience, but you must be one on whom nothing is lost.

—Henry James

Classrooms that generate good writing tend to be active places. Students may talk in pairs or small groups, offering peer critiques about works in progress. The teacher might be off in a corner, meeting with students for individual story conferences or offering a mini-lesson to answer a question that has just come up. And students who are actually putting words on paper might be working with pencil and paper, diagramming their ideas in story webs, or writing and editing on computers. When it's time to share writing samples, the teacher may volunteer himself as a model, reading his own work aloud and inviting students to offer feedback to guide revision.

Creating this atmosphere of a writers' workshop requires skill and flexibility on the teacher's part. It's a new role for many teachers: being a writing coach (and fellow writer), rather than the resident expert.

Cotton's research synthesis, although now more than a decade old, pointed to several practical suggestions that have stood the test of time. Among her key lessons for

writing teachers:

• Grammar and conventions are ineffective when taught in isolation from students' actual writing efforts. Instead, teach grammar in response to students' needs.

• Peer editing and evaluation can be just as effective as teacher evaluation of students' work in progress.

• Provide time for writing—students need practice to become capable writers.

• Provide models to allow students to "get a feel" for good writing. Reading experiences also enhance writing skills.

• Encourage good writing across the curriculum.

An ERIC Digest that traces how writing instruction has evolved (*Writing Instruction: Changing Views Over the Years*, November 2000) also outlines several ideas to "reconceptualize teaching" in the writing classroom. Author Carl Smith summarizes research suggesting that teachers:

• Allow students to take a more active role (i.e., let them choose their own writing topics)

• Build on students' knowledge while introducing challenging new material (sometimes called providing "instructional scaffolding")

• Collaborate with students to help them solve problems

• Encourage students to take increasing responsibility for their own learning

In many communities, teachers have taken the lead in promoting effective classroom practices. The National Writing Project (NWP), founded in 1974 at the University of California at Berkeley, has grown to include some 165 local sites—including at least one in each of the five states in the Northwest region—that help teachers improve how they teach writing. Local sites also develop programs that address particular needs in their communities, such as effective writing assessment or strategies to help students meet state writing benchmarks.

The grassroots project first engages teachers in the learning process, giving them a chance to focus on their own writing during an intensive summer institute. Then, throughout the following school year, teachers reconnect with fellow participants to continue brainstorming, problem solving, and providing peer support. *Educational Leadership* has called the project "arguably the most successful teacher network in the United States."

Researchers Ann Lieberman and Diane Wood share their analysis of what makes the project effective in the March 2002 issue of *Educational Leadership*. They write: "Because teachers engage directly in the learning process, they pay attention to the frustrations, fears, joys, and triumphs of being a learner. They can apply these insights to their teaching practices." Two key features emerge from their study of NWP sites:

• A distinctive set of social practices that motivate teachers, make learning accessible, and build an ongoing professional community

• Developing local networks that organize and sustain relationships among these communities and produce new and revitalizing forms of support, commitment, and leadership

Such supportive learning communities for adult learners mirror classrooms where students find time, effective instruction, and encouragement to develop into strong writers.

A recent evaluation of the National Writing Project by the Academy for Educational Development found that the project has "a profound impact" on participating teachers' beliefs and practices. NWP teachers make writing "part of everything we do." They tend to infuse writing throughout the curriculum and across subject areas, spending more time on writing instruction than non-participants. They are more likely to use exemplary instructional practices such as asking students to produce more than one draft, write in journals, choose their own topics, and use a computer to write and edit. (For more information about the National Writing Project or its local affiliates, see sidebar on Page 8.)

TWO SIDES OF A COIN

"What is the single most important thing that we as a profession know now that we didn't know 30 years ago about the teaching and learning of writing in elementary school?"

Researcher J.M. Jensen posed that question to education experts in 1993, 30 years after the critical Braddock Report. Their responses are captured in these key points:

- Writing in the early years is a natural gateway to literacy.
- All children can be writers.
- Understanding writing means understanding complex and interrelated influences—cognitive, social, cultural, psychological, linguistic, and technological.
- We write so that both we and others know what we think.

Two new books from NWREL illustrate that—especially during the early elementary years—reading and writing are as inseparable as two sides of the same coin.

Rebecca Novick, in *Many Paths to Literacy: Language, Literature, and Learning in the Primary Classroom*, draws on research and evidence coming from diverse classrooms to show, "when reading and writing are taught together, the benefits are greater than when they are taught separately." Like talking and listening, she asserts, "reading and writing are inseparable processes."

Many Paths to Literacy outlines a comprehensive program to help children build bridges from home to school, from oral language to written language, from letter decoding to reading comprehension. Novick, who has written widely on early literacy, integrates research findings with the insights, strategies, and classroom examples of effective teachers.

Sharing the Wisdom of Practice: Schools That Optimize Literacy Learning for All Students adds another layer of understanding to the concepts presented in *Many Paths to Literacy*. Written by Novick and Amy Fisher, *Sharing the Wisdom of Practice* takes an indepth look at the beliefs and practices of four diverse schools in the Northwest. The authors use examples from the region to present classroom strategies for promoting literacy among culturally diverse learners.

Another recent NWREL publication, *Learners, Language, and Technology: Making Connections That Support Literacy*, helps teachers understand the role technology can play in early literacy. Authors Judy Van Scoter and Suzie Boss outline classroom strategies to incorporate a wide range of tools to enhance learning. Student publishing receives special attention, along with projects that use technology to extend learning far beyond the classroom.

For information about ordering any of these publications, see the NWREL *Products Catalog Online*, www.nwrel.org/comm/catalog or call 1-800-547-6339, ext. 519.

NATIONAL EFFORT, LOCAL FOCUS

The National Writing Project, based at the University of California Berkeley, provides professional development to improve the teaching of writing and improve learning in the nation's schools. Teacher knowledge, expertise, and leadership are the cornerstones of this model, which has spread to include programs in all 50 states.

Every state—including the five states of the Northwest region—has at least one NWP-affiliated program that offers summer institutes where teachers examine their classroom practice, conduct research, and develop their own writing skills. During the school year, the same teachers continue to collaborate and provide one another with ideas, support, and more formal training in the "writing-to-learn" approach. Local sites also develop programs that address particular needs in their communities, such as effective writing assessment or strategies to help students meet state writing benchmarks.

For more information about the National Writing Project, start at the Web site: www.writingproject.org. A variety of resources and publications are available, as well as information about NWP activities.

For example, NWP Interactive is a growing online community of teachers, writing project site directors, and staff members who share tools, resources, and strategies about teaching writing. A variety of other initiatives are being developed to help participants explore the intersections of technology, writing, and learning.

In the Northwest region, NWP-affiliated programs offer a variety of resources for teachers, including:

ALASKA: Alaska State Writing Consortium, which involves school districts working together to promote and improve the teaching of writing in the state. Web site: http://pec.jun.alaska.edu/aswcpage.html.

IDAHO: Northwest Inland Writing Project, based at the University of Idaho. Web site: www.uidaho.edu/ed/niwp1.

MONTANA: Montana Writing Project, based at the University of Montana. Web site: www.umt.edu/english/mwp.htm.

OREGON: Oregon Writing Project includes programs on several colleges' sites around the state. For local contact information, visit the NWP Web site (www.writingproject.org), then select "Find a Local Site."

WASHINGTON: NWP programs include the Central Washington Writing Project (Web site: www.cwu.edu/~cwwp/e) and the Puget Sound Writing Project (Web site: http://depts.washington.edu/pswpweb/).

WRITING FOR A PURPOSE

I discovered the beauty of writing—when one can pour oneself onto a great white emptiness and fill it with emotions and thoughts and leave them there forever.

—Zlata Filopovic, author of *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo*

Capturing ideas on paper is hard work. Dr. Mel Levine, author of *All Kinds of Minds*, suggests that the process can break down for a host of reasons: memory challenges that interfere with the recall of vocabulary, content, or conventions; fine-motor challenges that make it hard for the fingers to keep up with the flow of ideas; attention deficits that can get in the way of concentration, planning, and organization of ideas.

What makes writing worth the effort? For many students, having a real audience provides motivation to overcome challenges and invest the time to shape, revise, and improve their writing. Teachers report using everything from e-mail exchanges to book publishing to connect student writers with audiences outside the classroom.

Writing To Make a Difference: Classroom Projects for Community Change (Teachers College Press, 2002) outlines the benefits of projects that connect student writers with their communities. Editor Chris Benson explains that the topics students take on through such projects vary widely from one place to another. But while topics vary, he adds, "the process doesn't. Once students select a topic that is relevant for them or for their community, they set to researching it, compiling information, and organizing data. When they have a thorough knowledge of the issues, they analyze the needs of their audience and their purposes for the writing. Then they draft and revise a document for the community."

An important step, Benson reports, "is field-testing the document on a real audience of readers. In field-testing, students gather more information about how readers actually use—and misuse—their document, and the students then use this information to improve the usability of the document through more revision."

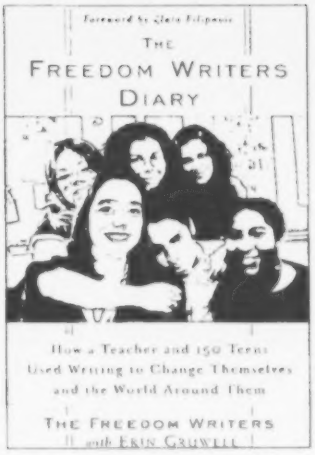
Dixie Goswami, director of the Write to Change program at Clemson University and a faculty member of the Bread Loaf School of English, outlines key principles of projects that take students—and their writing—into local communities. In *Writing To Make a Difference*, she explains that such projects motivate students to:

- Become researchers: The writing process requires students to become active researchers, introducing them to the methods and purposes of inquiry.
- Become writers: Students learn to write and publish for different audiences and purposes as well as understand relationships among critical reading, clear thinking, and effective communicating.
- Collaborate: Community-based writing projects engage students in cross-generational and cross-cultural work.
- Master basic skills, and go beyond the basics so that they achieve cultural literacy.

Something else happens, as well, when students communicate their ideas. Sharing writing with an audience puts the writer to a test that may be more genuine than any other form of assessment. As Hillocks explains: "The test of it is the extent to which it stimulates the reader's thinking. [To be successful] it must re-create some of the thinking that went into it, not the twists and turns leading to dead ends, but the sets of related thinking that must underlie main ideas and messages."

When student writers—indeed, writers of any age—are successful, their words resonate with readers. "We have all encountered that kind of writing," observes Hillocks, "the kind that writes on the soul, that changes forever the way we think about issues and people."

ONLINE RESOURCES: Donald Graves, author of *The Energy to Teach*, offers advice about teaching writing (www.donaldgraves.org). Dr. Mel Levine shares insights on how young writers can get stuck—and unstuck (www.allkindsofminds.org/library/articles/IgnitingTheirWriting.htm). National Council of Teachers of English provides a wealth of online resources (www.ncte.org). Information about the *Nation's Report Card on Writing* is available from National Center for Education Statistics (nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/writing/). □



KEEPIN' IT REAL

RIGHT OUT OF A FAIRY TALE, A ROOKIE TEACHER FROM AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL PLAYS FAIRY GODMOTHER TO HER KIDS' CINDERELLA STORY. HER MAGIC WAND? THE POWER OF WRITING.

Erin Gruwell insists "there was no master plan" behind her decision to assign journal entries as a freshman English class exercise. But what she heard in students' writing echoed the themes of literature: Loss and longing. Hope in the face of fear. A need to be heard. Courage to dream of a better future despite growing up in a setting that one boy compared to a war zone.

Gruwell overcame steep odds herself in order to help these kids share their stories with an international audience. In the process, students stopped seeing themselves as "rejects" and "unteachables," and took on a new identity: Freedom Writers. Their remarkable saga is chronicled in the students' own words in *The Freedom Writers Diary: How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change Themselves and the World Around Them*. The class writing project may have started small, Gruwell admits, "but it took on a life of its own."

Gruwell will be sharing highlights of this story when she delivers the keynote address at the Education Now and in the Future Conference, hosted by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in February. (See end of this story for details.) As a preview, she agreed to share with the readers of *Northwest Education* some thoughts on her approach to writing as a force for change.

Diary 68:

Today Ms Gruwell assigned a new writing project. We each are going to choose one of our favorite journal entries and combine them into a classroom book. . . . Ms. Gruwell wants us to pick an entry about an event that changed our lives. In my case, there is only one that really sticks out, but I want to forget it. Not because it is embarrassing, but because it is the most painful one.

While she was still a preppy-looking student teacher at Wilson High in racially diverse Long Beach, California, Gruwell experienced one of those classroom moments that changes everything. She happened to intercept a piece of paper that was making the rounds, leaving a ripple of laughter in its wake. The paper held a crude caricature of a certain black student with a bad attitude and worse disciplinary record. When Gruwell got hold of the paper, she went ballistic, telling her students the thick-lipped cartoon was like the propaganda the Nazis used during the Holocaust. Then a student asked her, "What's the Holocaust?" In that instant, a new curriculum was born. Gruwell recalls, "I immediately decided to throw out my meticulously planned lessons and make tolerance the core of my curriculum."

Tolerance can be a tough sell to students who have to dodge bullets on their way home. The challenge to Gruwell seemed urgent: "How could I motivate them to pick up a pen instead of a gun?" She introduced them to books written by young people who had come of age during wartime: *The Diary of Anne Frank*, for instance, and *Zlata's Diary*, describing a childhood in Bosnia. "My students saw that these other kids, living in real wars, had picked up pens, chronicled their pain, and made their story immortal."

If the stories from Room 203 were going to matter to anyone, Gruwell told students, they had to be honest. She assured students of anonymity, assigning each one a number. Using donated computers, all used the same 12-point, Times New Roman typeface. They all signed on to an honor code, worked out with the approval of the superintendent and lawyer for the district. Among themselves, they called their truth-telling "keepin' it real."

Previously, students had been inhibited in their writing. Now, cloaked in anonymity, "they were liberated. It was cathartic. They got into controversial topics," Gruwell says, including drugs, guns, sexual abuse, harassment, abortion. "It was a wellspring."

Although the writers remained anonymous, students took turns

reading aloud each others' entries. "I constantly used their stories to teach," Gruwell says. "We read aloud, edited aloud. I could take something from a journal and compare it to a story by T.C. Boyle or Amy Tan or Gary Soto. We could look at the work side by side, juxtaposing themes or comparing literary techniques. It's an authentic way to teach."

Authenticity was another key lesson. "We talked about being real vs. dramatizing. You can't embellish," Gruwell says, "or it takes away from the sincerity."

Gradually, Gruwell and her students realized the importance of sharing their work with a larger audience. "It's much more real when read by others," she says. In the tradition of the Freedom Riders of the 1960s, they called themselves the Freedom Writers. They began reaching beyond the confines of Room 203, sharing stories and touching lives all around the world. Eventually, their stories brought them face-to-face with their new heroes: Zlata Filipovic, author of *Zlata's Diary*, and Miep Gies, who gave shelter to Anne Frank.

Diary 108:

I didn't realize writing was so hard. It's very tedious and overwhelming, but satisfying at the same time. The writing assignments I do for Ms. G's class require draft after draft until everything is perfect. I can't begin to imagine how hard Nancy Wride has it when she goes through everything over and over to finish a story. That's what she does, she tries to make her work perfect for the Los Angeles Times. *Nancy Wride is a wonderful reporter who just wrote a story about us. . . . When Nancy's story was published, it felt as if the entire world had read it and then decided to call Room 203.*

It takes not only honesty but, often, many drafts to produce powerful writing. That's another message that Gruwell's students learned while honing their diaries into publishable pieces. She learned to teach the writing process while a graduate student, and coached her students through the steps of drafting, revising, peer editing, and more revising. She brought in professional writers to talk about their own process for producing polished work. And she used herself as a model, writing and revising right alongside her students.

Many students were struggling academically when they arrived in Gruwell's class. She used exercises to engage all types of students, including auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners. "I used a number of modalities to encourage writing. We did a lot of hands-on things," to give students experiences that would improve their writing. A favorite classroom metaphor: the hamburger. "We talked about a hamburger vs. a cheeseburger vs. a double double. The plain burger is just meat and bun. What makes the double double so special? It's the meat and the bun and the sauce and the cheese." Writing can be plain or delicious with details, too. Gruwell used all kinds of props to make sure her message got though—including, of course, "lots of burgers."

Not only did students have freedom to explore tough topics in their diaries, but they were free to "break away from the five-paragraph frame. I encouraged them not to use the standard format. I didn't want them to feel so confined that they'd wind up bitter about writing."

Instead, the Freedom Writers wound up becoming ambassadors for tolerance, winning national recognition, and having their diaries published as a book. A film is in the works. They have been heard by politicians and entertainers, and helped by generous patrons. Many are now in college—30 of them are back together this year with Gruwell, only this time it's at California State University at Long Beach where she's a distinguished educator. "They're such a unified family. They feel infallible," she says of her community of young writers.

"They aren't rock stars," adds Gruwell. "They're kids who changed their personas," and, just maybe, the world. "Education is the great equalizer." As one student shared in *The Freedom Writers Diary*, Day 177: "Days like this create memories worth living for."

Education Now and in the Future will take place February 10–11, 2003, at the Portland Hilton, with researchers and practitioners addressing a wide range of topics. Erin Gruwell will deliver her keynote address during lunch on February 11. The same afternoon, she will participate in a workshop called Our Lives in Our Own Words, which will explore the power of personal narratives for academic and personal growth. Conference information and registration materials are available online at www.nwrel.org/enf. To receive a conference catalog by mail, e-mail a request to enf@nwrel.org or call 1-800-547-6339, ext. 187.

Starting February 12, Portland State University's Graduate School of Education is offering more indepth training on Gruwell's tolerance-based writing curriculum. For information about the continuing education course, see the online description at www.ceed.pdx.edu/freedom. □

IDEAS WORTH BORROWING

What motivates students to write? As the following stories from Northwest classrooms illustrate, inspiration is everywhere: in the science lab, in family fairy tales, in local history. Examples vary in grade level and approach, but they share common themes: asking students to write about subjects that matter to them, providing time and opportunity for feedback and revision, and connecting young writers with readers by having them share their work with an audience.

LIFE STUDIES
MONTANA STUDENTS TELL THE STORY OF A PLACE AND ITS PEOPLE

By SUZIE BOSS

FLATHEAD VALLEY, Montana—The paintings catch your eye first—a weathered saloon, purple mountains, winding road, cascading stream. But it's the words that draw you in and encourage you to linger there on the city sidewalk, reading and learning about a place and its people:

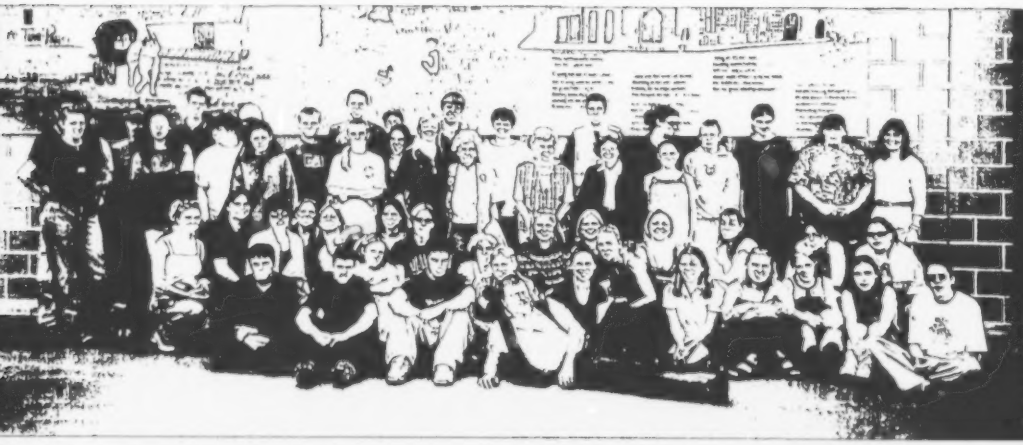
I sit and listen
As he paints the pictures
Of a time long ago
Upon the canvas of my mind
—*Eric Herriges*
Laser School, Kalispell, Montana

Across the Flathead Valley, poems and pictures are sprouting on the sides of theaters and restaurants, banks and title companies. The vibrant collection of murals is the work of a community based education effort called the Mural-Poetry Project.

Founder Laura Keller, an artist and poet herself, launched the nonprofit project on a shoestring five years ago. Her early glimmer of an idea has grown into a bright vision of what education can accomplish when it connects young minds with seasoned citizens, when it integrates the telling of stories with the making of art.

The murals draw inspiration from local history, with students interviewing older residents to gather ideas for their poems and accompanying images. So far, students ranging from fourth-graders to high school seniors have completed 14 murals in the communities of Whitefish, Kalispell, and Eureka. In the process, they are creating a new face for their communities to show the world, and a new way for young people to view their hometowns, their neighbors, and even themselves.

Keller, 43, started the project in her adopted hometown of Whitefish,



Students from Laser School in Kalispell, Montana, gather in front of their finished mural, installed on the side of a movie theater.

where her own daughter is now a senior in high school. Aware of how full teachers' days are already, Keller worked with the school district curriculum director to determine how this new project could mesh with existing learning goals. "We explored the whole question of curriculum. How could we justify this project in the classroom?" As they looked at standards, they found a natural fit in the content areas of language arts, history, and visual arts.

Before students sit down to interview longtime community residents, they talk in class about "what makes a good question. What should you not ask? How do you open a conversation and draw someone out?" Keller explains. Because many of the interviews take place at nursing homes and extended care centers, students also talk about fears or discomfort they might have about entering the environment of the elderly and infirm. The younger students are candid, Keller admits. "They want to talk about what to do if their subject doesn't hear well, or smells funny."

The goal, Keller explains to students, "is to breach barriers so you can get at the heart of the question: Who are you? What can you share with me about your life, your generation, your experiences?" Students tape record the conversations, which take place over several days. Many of the tapes are later added to oral history collections of local historical societies and museums. Listening to the tapes, Keller says, "You can hear when a student connects with an older person."

Whitefish High School language arts teacher Norma MacKenzie has been involved in producing four murals so far—three with her advanced junior and senior students and one with a class of freshmen. Some of the students go into the interviews "expecting to have nothing in common" with their subject. "But the older people grow in the kids' eyes," she observes, as students coax out the stories behind the gray hair and wrinkled brows.

Students know from the start that this is no classroom exercise. Their writing will appear in public and be read by a broad audience—not only by passing tourists, but also by their subject and his or her family members. Their work must not only be accurate, but also "honor the person they're writing about. This is the ultimate respect of a person—a tribute to someone's life," MacKenzie says.

Once they have conducted their interviews, students write an oral history that's factually accurate. They may need to do additional research in the library, sifting through old newspapers to get a better sense of a distant decade, or reading history books to learn more about an event such as World War II. Context becomes an important part of storytelling, and also reminds students of how the Flathead Valley is changing as the economy tilts toward tourism.

Using their prose as a foundation, students next move to writing poetry. "They try to capture the heart of their person in a poem," MacKenzie explains.

Moving from research to prose to poetry is a powerful lesson in how language can serve many purposes. When Keller guides students "deeper into the writing process," she might ask them, "Tell me the depth of the person in your poem. Tell me what you saw when you looked into her eyes." Brevity is important, given the limited physical space of the mural panels and the concise nature of poetry. Keller encourages young writers to hone their ideas, using action verbs to tell a story in short, punchy strokes; using metaphor to carry an image; using emotion to transcend a mere recitation of facts. Do all that, she promises, "and then you come down with poetry."

Examples abound: A fifth-grader from Edgerton School in Kalispell wrote of a woman whose smile "glows like a million-volt light bulb." A classmate described a man of advanced age as being "almost to

Detail (at left) of a mural in Whitefish, Montana. Student interviews a longtime resident (right) as part of the research process.

the place the cowboys go after the last roundup."

After writing their poems—compressing life stories into a few spare lines—students expand from words into visual art.

Typically, class members read their poems aloud and listen for common themes and concrete images. Keller asks them to consider, "What do you see when you hear these words?" Students begin by sketching. Individual sketches are shared with the group, and students decide collectively how the parts should make up the whole.

The actual painting of the mural often occurs outside the school grounds, in a place chosen so that the public can observe the process and interact with the young artists. Students have painted their murals in the basement of the Hockaday Museum, in shopping malls, in hospitals. The finished product is then installed on the side of a building chosen so that pedestrians can walk right up, close enough to read the words and see the brush strokes.

At Laser School, an alternative high school in Kalispell, art teacher Linda Tutvedt has enjoyed watching her students "step up to be leaders" of the art-making part of the project. One mural involved interviews with many of the artists, musicians, and writers who thrive in Flathead Valley, a place were the scenery seems to nourish creativity. Laser students—many of them nontraditional learners—made a strong connection with these kindred creative spirits. "They came in and shared their work, told us about their lives," the teacher says. The words and images students generated in response created "a lot of pride," Tutvedt says, and reminded others in the community of the gifts these young people have to offer.

A Laser student named Tyler Stephens wrote a poem to capture the life story of a local painter named Karen Leigh. "What Is Happiness?" begins:

You can't buy it
You can't steal it
You can't swallow or smoke it
It springs from a life of passion
Happiness is doing
what you love
Passion is loving what you do

These words now hang from the side of an old movie theater in Kalispell, drawing the eye of curious newcomers and those who have spent their whole lives in this valley. When Keller sees people lingering to read the lines, she hopes they manage "to see both generations represented here. In these words, you can hear those at the beginning stages of communication connecting with the wisdom of their elders. You see both innocence and experience." When that happens, she knows that students have succeeded in their goal as writers, "to use the power of words to connect with their community."

For more information about the Mural-Poetry Project, e-mail Laura Keller at lkeller@digisys.net.

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TALES OF TRIUMPH

FAIRY TALES WEAVE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Story by LEE SHERMAN

Photos by JUDY BLANKENSHIP

"The realm of fairy-story is wide and deep and high and filled with many things: all manner of beasts and birds are found there; shoreless seas and stars uncounted; beauty that is an enchantment, and an ever-present peril; both joy and sorrow sharp as swords."

—J.R.R. Tolkien

PORTLAND, Oregon—With a sleepy toddler tucked under her arm, a mother murmurs the nursery rhymes she learned from her own mother so many bedtimes ago. A grandfather delights in embellishing a ghost story for his pajama-clad grandson huddled, wide-eyed, under the covers. Beside a glowing woodstove, an ancient auntie gath-

Lilia Doni (far left) shares a fairy tale with her students at Whitman Elementary School. Two students (left) share their heritage dolls, dressed in traditional garb.

ers her nieces and nephews to her knee for a centuries-old story from the Old Country.

Such scenes play out each evening in every village, every city, the world around. Storytelling is as universal as bread, as human as love.

At Whitman Elementary School, a teacher is mining the rich potential of the most enduring of story forms —fairy tales—in her classroom of English language learners. Starting with such classics as *Rumplestiltskin* and *Cinderella*, ESL teacher Lilia Doni leads her diverse first-graders on a worldwide literary adventure that not only meets benchmarks in literacy (reading, writing, and public speaking), but integrates geography, social studies, drama, and foreign languages, as well.

The project's impact, however, doesn't stop there. Reaching even beyond these critical academic subjects and standards, this end-of-year culminating unit taps the familial ties by which stories are transmitted, generation to generation. Doni invites the students' parents to write and read aloud a story they've carried with them from their homeland of Mexico, Russia, Ukraine, Vietnam, Romania, or the Philippines. The goals of bringing family members into the classroom are to:

- Actively involve parents in their children's education
- Give parents a chance to publicly demonstrate their knowledge of culture, language, and literature
- Show students that speaking a second language is not a deficit but an asset

"I'm always looking to connect the parents to their children and give them ways to support their children's education," Doni says. "I send letters home in their language, asking them to share their favorite stories. By bringing the parents here and valuing them as experts, we cause the children to value them more and to see their importance. They feel pride in their cultural heritage."

Lam Nguyen Le sits at the front of the classroom, her daughter Amy Ngoc Le standing at her side. The first-graders listen attentively, taking notes as Mrs. Le reads a traditional Vietnamese tale from a handmade "book" she has written in her native Vietnamese. As the mother recites *A Bunch of Chopsticks*, about a dying father passing on a priceless lesson to his children, Amy translates each sentence, reading from the English version she has written in a handmade book of her own. From the story, the students learn that family members, like chopsticks, are stronger when they stick together in a "bunch" than when they stand alone.

As part of their presentation, mother and daughter show a two-foot-tall paper "heritage doll" that they have dressed in traditional garb, explaining the usefulness of the conical hat for warding off hot sun and the frequent tropical rains that pelt the jungles and rice paddies of the Southeast Asian nation. Pointing to Vietnam on a big world map, Mrs. Le teaches the students the words for "hello," "goodbye," and "thank you."

In preparation for the parent presentations, the Whitman first-graders have been studying the construction and conventions of stories. First, they read the whimsical tales of beloved children's author Leo Lioni to learn not only about plot, setting, and character—first-grade literacy benchmarks in Oregon's statewide standards—but also to infer themes and conflicts. Next, they read "trickster" stories from Mexico, where most of the students' roots are. Finally, the students delve into the riveting narratives of struggle and triumph that we call fairy tales. In the book *Snow White, Blood Red*, writer Terri Windling explains the psychological grip of this timeless genre: "The fairy tale journey may look like an outward trek across plains and mountains, through castles and forests, but the actual movement is inward, into the lands of the soul. The dark path of the fairy tale forest lies in the shadows

of our imagination, the depths of our unconscious. To travel the wood, to face its dangers, is to emerge transformed by the experience."

Exploring the origins of fairy tales, Doni's students study legendary storytellers and folklorists, such as the Brothers Grimm of Germany and Charles Perrault of France. They learn the elements of the fantasy genre—a long-ago setting, a heroine or hero, a villain ("bad guy," beast, criminal), a problem and solution, and a "motif" or theme. They look at five such motifs that appear in fairy tales: magical objects, wishes, trickery, separations, and transformations. Then they compare two stories.

Certain fairy tales cross cultures, popping up in all kinds of countries. The students explore one of the best-known of these international tales, about a wolf who tricks a family of baby goats into opening the door while their mother is out, whereupon he gobbles them up. In the Grimm Brothers' version of *The Seven Little Goats,* the mother goat slices open the wolf's belly while he's sleeping, frees the (still living!) kids, and replaces them with big stones; when the wolf tries to drink, the stones drag him into the well where he drowns. In the Chinese version, the kids and their mother toss the wolf down the well. The Romanian version features just three goat kids, and the mother goat gets revenge by inviting the wolf to dinner and setting a booby trap that causes him to burn at the bottom of a pit.

Some key features of fairy tales —repetition and rhythm—are evident in the various versions of this tale. For example, the wolf's plea, "Open the door, my children, your mother is home," is repeated several times throughout the Chinese version. The Grimm version contains this verse: "What rumbles and tumbles / Inside of me. / I thought it was kids, / But it's stones that they be." These techniques are powerful vocabulary builders, Doni notes.

"Fairy tales are classic literature that have stood the test of time for centuries," says Doni, a native of Moldova who is conversant in Spanish and fluent in Romanian, Russian, French, and English. "It is appealing to both adults and children because it deals with love, life and death, loss, fairness. Everybody's thinking about these big values."

In overcoming extreme circumstances, the fairy tale protagonist grows and matures, Doni explains. "This 'test' makes the character triumph or rejuvenate," she says. "They change from poor to rich or from weak to strong. They change emotionally and psychologically."

Child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, argues in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* not only that fairy tales are expressions of our cultural heritage, but that they "represent in imaginative form what the process of healthy human development consists of … (and) make great positive psychological contributions to the child's inner growth."

Parent participation in Whitman's fairy tale project reached a phenomenal 100 percent last year, thanks, Doni says, to the phone calls she and the school's pool of translators made to each family. "Providing translation is one part of working with families," she says. "But making personal contact—that's the most important part. Having parents on our side as our support and as their children's support helps us a lot."

Little Amy Le's pride in her mom is evident in her face as she listens to Lam Le read the story from her homeland. Says Doni: "The children felt so proud of their parents, because they were the heroes."

The Web features many sites on folk and fairy tales, including the I*EARN Folk Tale Project at www.nsc.ru/folk/, Scholastic's Myths, Folktales, and Fairy Tales Internet project at http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/mff/, and Folktale, Myth, Legend, and Fable at http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/tradmays.

> "Students saw that their teacher was no longer up in front of the class but sitting among them, shaping and revising his own writing."

EVERYBODY WRITES
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS DISCOVER THEIR VOICE

By SUZIE BOSS

ROYAL CITY, Washington— His Chilean accent offers the first clue that he didn't grow up amid the farms and apple orchards of eastern Washington. Like most of his students at Royal High School, teacher Mario Godoy-Gonzalez began life in another country, speaking Spanish as his first language. But it's his message, not his accent, that gets students excited about learning.

In his two-year classroom for English language learners, Godoy-Gonzalez teaches students to harness words to amuse, to enlighten, to inquire, to persuade. He teaches "six subjects in two languages," using English and Spanish to teach math, physical science, biology, world history, and two levels of English. Writing cuts across all subjects. In this classroom, everybody writes—including the teacher, the teaching assistant, and even the principal if he stops to visit.

"Writing is the key when it comes to getting kids more involved in class," Godoy-Gonzalez says.

Fostering student engagement was a priority when he was asked to develop the English as a second language program nine years ago. Another teacher was already working with ESL students at the middle school level, "and trying to keep an eye out for them when they got to high school," he explains. But even though the local population of Spanish-speaking children was growing, "most of these kids were quitting school after the eighth grade. There was nothing for them at the high school."

These days, Godoy-Gonzalez's students find a world of learning opportunities awaiting in his classroom. The teacher has leveraged his many awards and grants to purchase high-powered scientific and technical equipment. He also has expanded his own knowledge base in biology, botany, and biotechnology so that he can guide students through the process of scientific inquiry—which, of course, they write about.

Godoy-Gonzalez's approach to teaching science has earned national attention, including honors from the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation and a $10,000 Toyota Tapestry grant for a curriculum on ethnobotany. The Migrant Teacher of the Year for Washington state in 2000, Godoy-Gonzalez insists he's an unlikely candidate to be guiding students through the DNA analysis of wheat or the extraction of chemicals from herbs grown on local farms.

"I'm a teacher of English. I like history, and I know a little math. But science was scary to me," he admits. "After high school, I never took another science class. And in high school, it was: read the book, answer the questions, take the test. We never did real science."

As he sought ways to engage his students in the high school classroom, he was attracted by the hands-on nature of doing "real" science. When students peer into a microscope or gaze at the stars through a telescope, they experience the thrill of discovery. That can be a springboard for developing their language skills, as they seek to communicate what they have observed.

He also appreciated the chance to show students that their 44-year-old teacher was learning alongside them. A summer institute in life science, offered at the University of Washington and sponsored by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, gave him a foundation in scientific methods. He has continued seeking opportunities to learn alongside scientists willing to serve as his mentor. The Science Education Partnership Program at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center offered "another great science learning experience." Science, Godoy-Gonzalez has

Mario Godoy-Gonzalez immerses his students in scientific inquiry, which becomes a springboard for writing. Photo by Torsten Kjellstrand

learned, "is a never-ending story."

In his classroom, writing has been the key to unlocking students' understanding of science. Many of his students arrive from Mexico and other countries with little formal schooling to build on. "They may not have been to so many places yet," the teacher notes, or had classroom exposure to scientific concepts. So when he was launching into a unit on environmental science, he started at the beginning. "I asked them, what do you think the environment *is?*" He drew a planet and encouraged them to share ideas. "We talked about good and sad things about the Earth." The conversation picked up steam as these farm workers' children shared their firsthand knowledge of soil, water, air. On an impulse, he took their words and created a rhyme. "Then I thought, maybe we should all write poetry as a way to express our concerns about the environment."

That broke the ice. Writing poems "made these students realize, we can do this. We can write about science," he says. "For many of my students, writing an essay seems too hard. It takes so many words," many of which are technical. By the time they look up a scientific term in the dictionary, "they have lost the sense of where they wanted to use the word in their writing."

With poetry, however, students found their voice. "Poetry gets the brain and the heart working together," Godoy-Gonzalez says. When students asked him if they could mix English and Spanish words in the same poem, he granted them artistic license. "I tell them, it's your heart writing. Find the words to express what you feel."

And they did, as these elemental poems illustrate:

Water
Water, vital liquid
Rejuvenate us, take away our thirst
Keep us fresh and clean. Amen.

Air
Air looks pale and sick,
Leaving the city, going away.
Go! Find a better place to breathe.

Always eager to add more dimensions to his teaching, Godoy-Gonzalez shared ideas about writing poetry that he had learned through the Central Washington Writing Project, affiliated with the National Writing Project. He showed students how poetry can take many forms—haiku, acrostic, quatrain. Working in peer groups, students offered one another feedback for revision and improvement of their poems. And they were learning another lesson: "Writing never ends. You're always improving, revising, expanding."

What's more, students saw that their teacher was no longer up in front of the class but sitting among them, shaping and revising his own writing. "Kids saw that I became part of it. I was their partner. We all got into it," the teacher says.

Ever since, he's been using poetry across the curriculum. When students study ancient Egypt, they might write poems from the point of view of a pharaoh. "This makes writing not so hard. It becomes more like a game."

Once students gain confidence as poets and learn to improve their work through the process of revision and peer editing, they are ready to tackle longer pieces. By their second year in his classroom, Godoy-Gonzalez's students are busy polishing letters that they send to recipients in the "real world." He explains: "I have them present ideas, make arguments, or request information by writing letters. They state at the top of their letters: I am an ESL student, working to improve my language. I need someone to read what I've written, and would love to get a reply." Frequently students do receive feedback, and it often includes the encouragement to keep writing.

After two years in the ESL program, Godoy-Gonzalez's students enter mainstream classes. Many are thriving there, meeting graduation requirements and preparing for

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> "Writing for an audience has given purpose to the process of learning to write."

college. One former student is studying to be a doctor. Another has received scholarships to fund her dream of becoming a teacher. Since he launched the ESL program nine years ago, the number of Hispanic students graduating from 300-student Royal High has been on the increase: eight in 1994, 20 in 2000, nearly 30 last year.

As a member of the Latino/a Educational Achievement Project, Godoy-Gonzalez is now lobbying the state legislature to expand financial aid so that more of these students can go to college. To legislators and any others who will listen, he delivers a passionate message: "These kids are here to stay in our communities. They are working hard to earn good grades and meet the standards we have set for them. Colleges and universities are willing to admit them, but their families need help paying the cost of college. High school cannot be the end of the road for these students. We can't share just part of the American dream with them."

TRAVELING BY POST "PAPER EXCHANGE STUDENTS" EXPLORE THE GLOBE

Their real-life counterparts learn writing skills and a lot more.

By JOYCE RIHA LINIK

Being squashed flat by a large heavy object can have its advantages. Just ask any kid who's read a whimsical children's book by the name of *Flat Stanley*. In the story, when young Stanley Lambchop is turned into a human pancake by a falling bulletin board, he doesn't despair. Instead, he makes the best of the situation as he discovers the benefits of being a mere half-inch thick. These include slipping down a street grate to retrieve his mother's lost ring, posing as the subject of a pastoral painting to catch art thieves at the Famous Museum, and folding himself into an envelope so that his parents can afford to send him to visit friends in California.

It's the last of these feats that has captured the imaginations of hundreds of schoolchildren throughout the Northwest and around the globe who are creating Flat Stanleys (essentially, paper dolls modeled after the storybook character) and other "flat people" (similar representations created in their own images and bearing their own "flat" names) to travel as exchange students to destinations near and far. Although Jeff Brown's book was published in 1964, this practice has only become widespread in recent years due to the development of an organized Flat Stanley Project with a home on the World Wide Web.

The project (http://flatstanley.eneoreo.ca) is the brainchild of Dale Hubert, a Canadian schoolteacher who saw the potential for Flat Stanley to become a vehicle for classroom instruction. Hubert's idea was to have kids send their Flat Stanleys to other schools with a letter asking a host class to show the flat visitor around and record his daily adventures in a journal, then return him and his travel journal to his home classroom. Hubert hoped to inspire kids on both ends to read and write letters, improving literacy skills in the process.

When Flat Kirsten arrived in an envelope at Bainbridge Island's Captain Charles Wilkes Elementary School, third-grade teacher Alice Mendoza was puzzled. She had never heard of Flat Stanley. Fortunately, the paper girl arrived with a letter explaining the project and requesting that Mendoza's students show her what life was like on this Northwest isle, far from her Midwestern home. Mendoza thought it seemed like a fun opportunity and introduced the visitor to her class.

One at a time, student volunteers took turns hosting Flat Kirsten for an evening or a weekend, taking her along on such routine outings as softball practices and shopping trips, as well as on sightseeing excursions around Bainbridge Island and to Mount St. Helens. A number were

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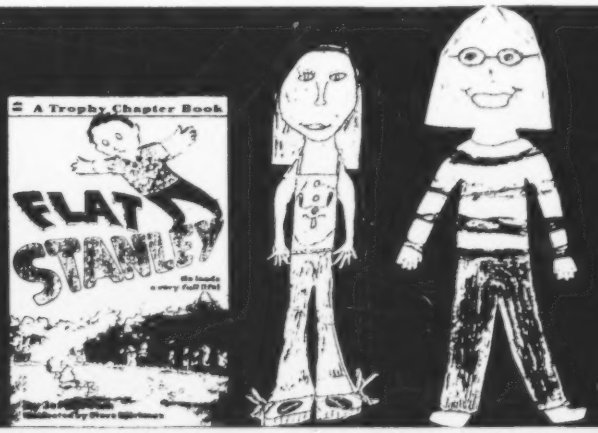


inspired to record Flat Kirsten's adventures not only in writing, but with a camera as well; they sent this documentation with their flat friend when it was time for her to be mailed back home. The experience was such fun for the students that Mendoza decided to integrate the project into an interdisciplinary study of Pacific Rim cultures, incorporating learning goals in both language arts and social studies.

After creating paper representations of themselves, Mendoza's students set about writing the all-important letters that would accompany their flat alter-identities on their journeys, introducing them to their hosts and asking for the kind of information that would make their study of Pacific Rim cultures come alive. For third-graders, this involved such basics as learning how to write in correct letter format and how to address an envelope. It also included learning the nuances of effective communication, including such things as how to target writing to a particular audience and how to include details to make writing more engaging. The writing process included creating multiple drafts, undergoing peer and teacher reviews, and revising and editing work until a final, polished letter was ready to be mailed.

"We discussed what constitutes a quality letter," says Mendoza, "and put the standard on a chart" for easy reference. The list included reminders to make good use of paragraphs, pay attention to spelling and punctuation, and employ descriptive language. Mendoza also provided examples and modeled writing a letter to guide her students through the process. "Make your writing matter," Mendoza told her students. "Make it something someone will want to read."

Because students could see the real-world value of the assignment (after all, a good letter would be more likely to elicit the kind of response they desired), they took the assignment seriously.

"We started with our 'sloppy copy'," explains nine-year-old Chelsea, "and then looked at punctuation and spelling and if we needed to add anything to make it make sense. I tried to make mine as good as possible—I did, like, four drafts to get it perfect."

"In my first draft," says classmate Sasha, "I wrote too much stuff and misspelled things and was missing punctuation, but now I write much better letters." For example, Sasha notes, "Instead of just saying, 'She likes something,' Mrs. Mendoza helped me put better words, like 'She loves doing this and does it all the time.' It makes the person who's reading it really understand. I think I put more details into my work now."

In addition to sharing something about themselves and where they were from, students wanted to be sure that their hosts would send back information about their own life experiences and culture. To help her students learn to ask effective questions, Mendoza showed her students a video on cultures around the world and engaged them in a discussion of what cultural elements they might be interested in learning more about—for instance, information on the food and clothing of a country or how the arts might be celebrated. Mendoza says, "I seed the conversation by asking the kinds of questions that help students learn about another culture."

Once their letters were finished and their flat people tucked safely inside, students walked their envelopes to the school office to mail them to distant lands. Flat Sasha set off for Japan. Flat Nicholas flew to the Philippines. Flat Chelsea was on her way to Alaska.

And then the students waited.

While not everyone got a response in the ensuing weeks, Mendoza reports, the majority did. And of those returning envelopes, Mendoza says, "Wow! Kids got back photos and memorabilia with wonderful letters and stories" of each

Flat Stanley has spawned many imitations, including this trio of globe-trotting "Flat People" from Captain Charles Wilkes Elementary School on Bainbridge Island.

flat person's adventures. The students mounted this material on display boards and made presentations to their classmates.

A year later, students are still talking about each other's presentations. Jaimie remembers Michael's presentation on Thailand, complete with photos of colorful papier-mâché dragons in red and green and gold parading down the streets. Sasha was astounded by Nicholas's Philippine Island photographs of an exotic market where vegetables were stacked beneath strings of "fish and dead pigs hanging and all sorts of strange meats."

"I was really overwhelmed," says Mendoza, regarding the quality of the work throughout the project. "High motivation equals quality products," she explains. Students were so excited about the project that they were willing to do the work.

"We learned so much from this project," Mendoza says. For starters, "the kids' writing improved because they were held to high expectations." And other learning goals were met. "If you take the time to look at a project like Flat Stanley, " Mendoza says, "you can make the project work for you and see how it can be tailored to meet EALRs [Essential Academic Learning Requirements, the Washington state standards]." In this case, she says, "there were EALRs met up and down the ladder."

Mischelle Bain, a third-grade teacher at Kasuun Elementary in Anchorage, Alaska, agrees that the Flat Stanley Project is "a great way to meet curriculum requirements." She has found ways to address learning goals in language arts and social studies, and even in math and geography. For example, in math, students calculate the distance that their flat people have traveled to reach other destinations and the distance that other children's flat people have traveled to reach their classroom in Alaska. To reinforce geography lessons, students mark these journeys on a large bulletin board map with pins and color-coded string so that they can keep track of their own traveling flat people as well as those visiting from afar.

To address language arts and social studies learning goals, Bain follows an approach similar to Mendoza's. Her students take part in a writing process, preparing multiple drafts with both peer and teacher reviews, and asking probing questions to learn about how people in different places live. Since Bain's project is not tied to a specific geographic region, her students are free to send their flat people wherever they'd like —to friends or relatives, for example, or to another classroom in the United States or another country.

Writing for an audience has given purpose to the process of learning to write, Bain says. "Students are interacting with people instead of with an English book," she explains. "They're not just formulating a sentence to write a better sentence; it's for a purpose. This really makes connections for students."

Additionally, the practice of writing for different audiences elicits a different response from students. Bain says this provides good practice in the difference between public and private writing. "If students are writing to another classroom," she says, "the letter is more formal. If they're writing to Grandma, it's more personal. Kids are more serious about it when it's going to another classroom," she says, whereas "Grandma probably wouldn't critique it."

From a social studies standpoint, Bain says the project has been enlightening for her students. Because many of these pupils come from poor economic backgrounds, they have few opportunities for travel. This project allows them to learn about places far from home, including the lower 48. Bain smiles when she shares the story of one student who wanted to send his flat person way down south to Texas, but wanted to know if they spoke English there. "The project broadens their horizons," she says.

The trip to Anchorage is also

David McKay, Washington State Teacher of the Year for 2002, keeps looking for new ways to inspire students.

enlightening for some of its virtual visitors. They are sometimes surprised to learn that Anchorage's citizens are not living in igloos, Bain says. When a flat visitor returns home, Bain tucks in a postcard of Anchorage's skyline, lined with tall buildings like any other big city. But she also tucks in postcards of regional wildlife, including bears and moose, as well as Alaska's famous Northern Lights.

"Kids see the differences," Bain notes, "but also a lot of similarities. They're often surprised at how much we have in common." Bain calls this the "hidden curriculum" of the Flat Stanley Project. While learning academic goals, children from different places are also learning to accept and appreciate each other.

Sasha, now a fourth-grader, says that she learned a lot about Japanese culture when Flat Sasha came home last spring. "I got an idea of what Japan looked like," she says, observing that "it was different than here." Still, she notes, there were striking similarities: Her host family included a father, a mother, and kids, much like any family here, and the father worked in an office with computers like many an American dad. And she adds: "The house was different on the outside—the roof was stone shingle and there were different kinds of plants, but inside it looked similar, like it could have been here."

Mendoza says her students have gained a world view that extends far beyond their Puget Sound island. They have gained "a connection to the world," and have come to see both the similarities and differences between other world cultures and their own. "In a pluralistic society," Mendoza says, "it is critically important for children's eyes to be opened to the cultural realities beyond their own." Especially after 9/11, she says, "the project has been a wonderful way for kids to realize how much we have in common versus what is different."

LEARNING BY THE BOOK
STUDENTS PUBLISH A SERIES OF LOCAL BESTSELLERS

By BRACKEN REED

ABERDEEN, Washington—In the early morning hours of January 6, 2002, the oldest building on the Aberdeen High School campus went up in flames. Built in 1909, the Weatherwax building was, for many, the heart and soul of both the school and the community. Within its classic red-brick walls was a storehouse of communal memory—a copy of every annual in the school's history, decades-old trophies displayed next to the newly won, murals and photographs reflecting nearly a century of school and town history. When the fire was finally extinguished, the school's library, textbook depository, computer lab, Special Education department, English language learners department, counseling offices, and 22 classrooms were lost. One of those classrooms was that of English teacher, David McKay, the 2002 Washington State Teacher of the Year.

In the aftermath, the school scrambled to find classroom space. McKay was given a seldom-used basement room near the school's auditorium. "It smelled awful," recalls Loyal, one of McKay's students. "I think he went through the rubble and pulled out whatever he could find. He had papers spread out all over the room, trying to dry them out. It smelled like smoke for weeks." McKay's senior teaching assistant, Jason, nods his head in agreement. "He's so dedicated," he says with a smile, "he's crazy."

McKay's dedication, passion for teaching, and ability to rise to the challenge are the hallmarks of his success. He's known throughout the school for his intensity, good humor, and ability to engage his students. His style of reading out loud, for instance, complete with facial expressions, gestures, and voices for each

> "They buy in to the idea that they are making books—something that will last a long time, be found in homes and local libraries, be read by people they know."

character, is legendary. "My first couple weeks in his class—I thought he was nuts," says Loyal. "I was like, 'What *is* this?' But pretty soon it was my favorite class. He definitely gets you into it, because *he's* so into it."

With more than a decade of teaching experience behind him, McKay has never stopped looking for new ways to challenge his students and himself. During the 1999–2000 school year, he decided to take a deeper look at his writing instruction. Frustrated with his inability to get all his students motivated to do their best work, he decided to try something different: a yearlong project to research, write, publish, and sell an entire book. "I needed an assignment that would take students to a higher level," McKay says. "Being published is attractive to many students. They buy in to the idea that they are making books—something that will last a long time, be found in homes and local libraries, be read by people they know. It challenges them to raise their standards to another level."

The next step for McKay was to choose a subject that would not only engage the students, but also be a meaningful contribution to the community and a financial success. "We do a market study to determine how many books to publish for each project," he says. "It's very important to be accurate. The sales need to cover the cost of making the books. Without sales, projects in the future might not happen."

McKay wanted something that would tap into the deep community spirit and colorful history of Aberdeen, a community of about 16,000 located on Grays Harbor, about 50 miles west of Olympia. McKay quickly recognized a good subject. The tradition of a Thanksgiving Day football game between Aberdeen and neighboring Hoquiam dates back to at least 1906. "This is the most intense rivalry I have ever seen," says McKay, "and the entire community is 'in on it.'"

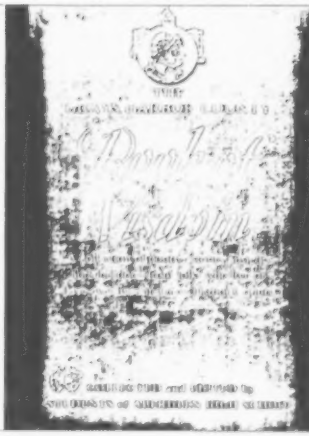
With the full support of the school's administration, McKay sent his students into the community to interview their parents, families, and community members who had graduated from either high school between 1906 and 1973. Students went into assisted-living centers and local restaurants to get as much firsthand information as they could about the early days of the rivalry. In the end, they had gathered more than 100 oral histories. From there, McKay sent students to the library. They looked in old newspapers and school annuals, double-checked the facts, and collected articles and photographs. Every student was required to submit a written document. McKay then chose one Junior English class to compile and edit all the materials into a professional-quality manuscript.

When the manuscript was complete, McKay sent it to a nearby book publishing company and ordered 1,000 copies. Within two months, the first run had sold out. With the help of the district office, McKay had secured $10,000 toward the publishing costs, but the book immediately paid for itself. Another 500 copies were ordered, and they, too, sold out. It was an enormous success with the community.

It was also a hit with students. "It was fun, and it was really challenging," says Leslie, now one of McKay's senior students. "You wanted it perfect because you knew people were going to be reading it. It definitely wasn't something you were just going to do in one night to get a grade." For Jason, the subject matter made it interesting. "Pretty much anything went," he says. "Some pretty colorful stuff has happened over the years, because of how strong the rivalry is, but he [McKay] let us keep it in. As long as we had a source for it, it went in." Loyal agrees, "It was interesting stuff you actually wanted to hear about. Everyone could relate to it."

For McKay, success has led to success. Sales of the book added up to twice the investment for printing,

Phoenix Edition
Personal Essays Written by Students of Aberdeen High School
Lutefisk for the Bobcat Soul
"Vichvun yew moots vants da lutefisk?"
("Which one of you outta wants the lutefisk?")



Two volumes (at right) from Aberdeen High School's student writers

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For McKay, success has led to success. Sales of the book added up to twice the investment for printing. Profits were put into a general fund that has supported further projects, including *The Grays Harbor County Book of Wisdom* (2001) and *Lutefisk for the Bobcat Soul: Personal Essays Written by Students of Aberdeen High School* (done annually for the past three years). Each project has been self-sustaining and met McKay's goal of increasing student motivation and raising the level of their writing.

"It's clearly more difficult and challenging for the students than just writing a paper," he says. "They understand that the stakes are high. Because publishing is permanent, accuracy and correctness are extremely important. Almost all of them rise to the challenge, and some go farther—they discover that they are writers and have something to offer other people. They are extremely proud to be published authors, and they learn a great deal about how writing can affect people's lives."

This attention to both the big picture and the small details fits seamlessly into McKay's overall teaching strategy. "The projects are one part of a broad process," he says. "We use the six traits (of writing assessment), study grammar, build vocabulary, have writing workshops, and do a lot of other things, but I like using project-based learning. If you look at the state standards, this addresses many of the bullets, but it also mirrors how we all have to operate outside of school. It helps students understand that the beginning of a process is as important as the end. When you add the element of working with others, it really becomes applicable and beneficial in terms of lifelong learning."

Still working out of his temporary classroom, McKay continues to teach his students not only writing skills, but also the discipline needed to weather adversity and complete demanding projects. Their most recent, the Phoenix Edition of *Lutefisk for the Bobcat Soul*, shows students again rising to the challenge.

THE ROOTS OF NIKISKI

ALASKAN STUDENTS DISCOVER THEIR HERITAGE AND LEAVE A LEGACY OF THEIR OWN

By JOYCE RIHA LINK

NIKISKI, Alaska—Here on the northeastern edge of the Kenai Peninsula, blankets of evergreen drape the hillsides, frothy waves slap against the rocky shore, gulls and raptors dance overhead. Across the Cook Inlet, the mountains of the Alaska Range can be seen raising their snowcapped heads to the sun. It's easy to see the allure, to understand why early homesteaders were willing to face wild animals, arctic winters, and the absence of any creature comforts to settle here.

When Nikiski's first homesteaders came to this area in the 1950s, there was little more than a tire-track road winding through the wilderness. Early residents had to

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> "Young and old were working together, creating something real and important."

foods—were trucked in along the beach. The same truck would then be filled with fish to head back to the canneries.

These stories would likely be lost if not for a recent eighth-grade project at Nikiski Middle School. The interdisciplinary project—bridging social studies, language arts, science, and math—focused on the local community as a subject of inquiry. The effort, aligned with state and district learning goals, involved weaving writing throughout the curriculum and including action research as part of the writing process. Students assumed roles of historians, writers, scientists, and statisticians, working on projects ranging from recording oral histories and composing poetry to preparing scientific field reports and summarizing mathematical studies. The culmination of the project was a 70-page book written by the students for and about the community: *Away From Almost Anything Else: An Interdisciplinary Study of Nikiski.*

The community seemed like the ideal subject for the interdisciplinary study, says Scott Christian, the English teacher who oversaw the project. For starters, students didn't know much about the history of their community. And while all took part in outdoor activities, most had never stopped to ponder the natural treasures that surrounded them. What they saw as teens, many of whom had lived in Alaska all of their life, was a small, rural town in the middle of nowhere where nothing much was happening. "The students had a real chip on their shoulders," says Christian, now the director of the Professional Development Center at the University of Alaska Southeast in Juneau. "Students thought that places like California and New York were cool, but where they lived was boring."

Teachers saw the community study as an opportunity for students to learn about the heritage of their unique town and gain some appreciation for the environment in which they lived. Because teachers had already been engaged in an effort to create a community of learners, they saw a prime opportunity in a project that would involve community members, young and old, in a joint effort to preserve a bit of Nikiski's heritage.

The first part of the project involved preserving the oral histories of notable residents. Many students sought out original homesteaders, often a grandparent or neighbor. Interview topics included such subjects as reasons for moving to Alaska, including jobs, love, and adventure; the challenges of early homesteading; natural events affecting the area, such as the devastating earthquake of 1964, blizzards, and drought; and shifting employment opportunities, including the shift from commercial fishing in the early days to oil drilling and production in more recent times. Additionally, as eighth-grader Mario noted while recording the oral history of an early homesteader, "Almost any sourdough in Alaska has one or two bear stories to tell . . . ." This claim is borne out in numerous accounts of interactions with "brownies," as well as confrontations with others of the four-footed variety, including porcupines hiding in outhouses, squirrels invading cabins, and stubborn moose blocking trails. Students were as happy to hear and record these stories as their elders were to share them.

"An important byproduct of these interviews was the generational interaction that cannot be achieved by field trips to the senior citizens' center for Christmas carols. Here, the young and old were working together, creating something real and important," Christian writes in *Writing To Make a Difference: Classroom Projects for Community Change*, a book he co-edited with Chris Benson. "Time after time," he adds, "the interviewees expressed how delightful it was to sit down and have a meaningful conversation with a teenager." Christian asserts

Photo of a snowy cabin accompanies a young writer's poem in *Away From Almost Everything Else*

that, despite bad reports in the media, "teens today are capable of complex, sophisticated work of high quality." To help them achieve this, he says teachers must employ practices "such as cooperative learning, authentic assessment, integrated technology, and interdisciplinary teaching."

While writing was integral to the study of all subject areas, language arts were front and center during the second part of the project when the environment became the inspiration for poetry. Students first studied works by several poets, including Robert Frost and e. e. cummings. Then they took a field trip to nearby Bishop Creek, a salmon-rich waterway that winds through a heavily wooded area and feeds into the Cook Inlet. They spent time observing the natural wonders and scribbling ideas for their own poems. They then returned to school for a monthlong process of writing, engaging in peer and teacher reviews, and editing multiple drafts.

The idea of writing as a process was new to most of Christian's students who were well-practiced at filling in the blanks on worksheets, but intimidated by the directive to analyze a rough draft and see how it could be improved. Because they were motivated to produce a quality publication, they saw the value of honing their work to create the best piece of writing possible.

Christian helped by modeling the process of writing. He subjected his own rough drafts—mistakes and all—to his students' criticism, and revised his work to make improvements. "If it's OK for the teacher to make mistakes and do five revisions," he says, the students decide, "It's OK for me." He adds: "There's a very different environment when teachers are writing—when teachers present themselves as writers and show kids the idiosyncratic nature of writing. It makes it more real and accessible."

Poetry turned out to be a perfect medium for these teens. "Their school identity is what happens in middle school. They really decide who they're going to be," Christian observes. "Poetry is a way to process what they're thinking and feeling." He adds: "One way or another, they'll express themselves. This is a positive, directed way to do it."

At Bishop Creek, "kids picked up images and connected them to their lives," Christian says. "That was thrilling to see." Jessica, for example, saw two bald eagles perched in a tree and compared them to herself and her mother, using the metaphor as an opportunity to explore this relationship. When Jason saw trees' roots exposed and dangling over the creek bank "grasping for life, wishing to be on rich soil," he compared this natural erosion of the environment to the process of human life where, he writes, people move "closer and closer to death/ And those who grow on the edge/ Will fall early."

A number of students found a voice through the process, and some even found peer acceptance. At the outset, "Jason did not see himself as a writer," Christian says. "He was very quiet and saw himself as an outsider." When classmates expressed how impressed they were with his poem, telling him, "You're like Shakespeare," there was a real transformation. "That was his entry into the eighth-grade group."

Writing scientific field reports turned out to be more of a challenge for students. Because these reports were factual and objective—describing the step-by-step process by which they collected samples of plant life from a two-by-two-foot plot of land at Bishop Creek and then cataloging and identifying the species—students had to learn to write in what seemed another language entirely. "It was hard for kids," says Christian, after the first-person narratives of the oral histories and the emotive, imagistic language of poetry. "It's like using a different part of your brain," he says, "writing in a new voice, to a new audience."

> "Each of us is like a tree, and what we encounter in life—our experiences and so forth—yields fruit."

Summarizing statistical data for the math portion of the project was similarly vexing. But students rose to the challenge and created a body of work in which both teachers and students could take pride.

Clearly, the Nikiski project reinforces the value of authentic work for engaging students. "I don't think kids are used to doing sophisticated, complex, professional work in school," says Christian. Through projects like this, students are motivated to learn because they have a real purpose. He adds: "Middle school students can smell B.S. a mile away. Their mantra at this age is, 'Why are we doing this?'" They want to know what value an assignment has in the real world. The Nikiski project, which provided the community with the first written history of the area, gave them a job with real-world value. The book was not only distributed among the students and their families, but was also made available for sale to the public via the local post office and bookstore. No doubt, it will serve as a valuable resource for generations to come.

Christian reports that the publication of *Away From Almost Everything Else* was "a great way to celebrate student work," as well as an effective motivator that "helped them take their work to another level."

As important, the project helped these teens gain a sense of pride in their community. The process helped them to see that "there was real history right here," Christian says, "and that where they lived was pretty cool after all."

RIDING "LA ALFOMBRA MÁGICA" ESL STUDENTS EXPLORE THEIR ROOTS THROUGH WRITING

By JOYCE RIHA LINIK

MEDFORD, Oregon—With legs crossed and arms loosely folded, 23 seven- to nine-year-olds settle on "la alfombra mágica," ready to travel wherever teacher JoAnna Lovato might be steering them today. Their "magic carpet," bright with primary colors, is always fueled up and ready to go. From the front of their classroom, these students journey through stories to places where their family roots run deep—countries like Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Colombia—and then back to this country where their lives now branch out.

The magic carpet seems the perfect imaginary transport for these children, all native Spanish speakers, who are part of Lovato's bilingual class at Wilson Elementary. One of her objectives is to teach these second- and third-graders to read and write in their native language first, and then help them transfer these skills to English. This approach better enables them to one day become bilingual adults who have retained ties to their cultural heritage, attained fluency in two languages, *and* learned to navigate successfully in American culture.

Instead of seeing her students' sociolinguistic background as a barrier to instruction, Lovato celebrates it and uses it to forward her students' education in not just one, but two languages. "The stronger the literacy foundation they have in their first language," says Lovato, "the more they will have to transfer over to English, as supported by research." She adds: "Building a strong literacy foundation in my students' first language helps ensure academic success and heightened self-esteem." In short, she argues, it

Throughout the layers of the wheel, illustrations highlight details of the student's prose, resulting in a wheel that reflects the child's life in words and pictures.

helps them succeed in life.

To engage her students, Lovato says she tries to employ "projects that are not only authentic, but culturally appropriate," making use of students' prior experiences as a springboard for learning. "Students are not blank slates," she says. "I find it so important to tap into what the students bring to the classroom."

One such project is called the Tree of Life. Lovato got the idea at the 2002 California Association of Bilingual Education conference early last year. Educators and authors Yvonne Freeman, David Freeman, and Sandra Mercuri delivered a presentation on their book, *Closing the Achievement Gap: How to Reach Limited-Formal Schooling and Long-Term English Learners*, and on the Tree of Life project discussed therein, whereby students explored their family trees, cultural traditions, and ultimately their own identities through writing. Although the project was originally intended for middle school students, Lovato decided to adapt the project for her own second- and third-graders.

Earlier in the year, Lovato had engaged her students in a project where they read published autobiographies by others with multicultural backgrounds—*Just Like Me: Stories and Self Portraits by Fourteen Artists*, edited by Harriet Rohmer, and *Family Pictures* by Carmen Lomas Garza, for example —and watched Lovato model writing her own autobiography. They then immersed themselves in writing their own autobiographies and family stories, from rough drafts, through peer and teacher reviews, revisions, and ultimately to "publication."

Through the Tree of Life project, Lovato saw an opportunity to reinforce earlier lessons and take learning a step further. The project has each student create a colorful laminated paper "wheel" that carries the stories and images of his or her life. Lovato compares these 11-inch-diameter wheels to the fruit borne on trees. "The tree serves as a common metaphor for life," she explains. "Each of us is like a tree, and what we encounter in life—our experiences and so forth—yields fruit."

Like the complexities of life, each wheel is layered. The top layer bears an illustration of a road, symbolic of each student's path through life, and includes a clear laminate triangular "window" which, when rotated, reveals slices of the layer beneath. Featured on the top layer is a three-stanza autobiographical poem written by the student. Each stanza of this poem begins with the words "Yo soy" ("I am") and the student's first name, and then continues on to respectively reveal stories of the student's past, present, and future. Among this group of bicultural students, similar themes often appear.

For example, in "past" poems, students who have immigrated often write about their lives before and after coming to the United States. Olegario, for instance, writes about the poverty his family endured when he was a young child in Mexico. He tells how his father moved first to the U.S. to find work so that he could send money for food and clothing home to his wife and children. Sharing like histories is empowering for these kids, reports Lovato. In a mainstreamed classroom, they might not have the confidence to share these stories of struggle, but here they find their voice.

In "present" poems, many students focus on their school and teacher, as well as their wish to become bilingual. Already, it seems they grasp the value of being at home in both Hispanic and American cultures.

In "future" poems, students reflect on their dreams and ambitions. Many plan to go to college, prompted not only by their teacher, but also by parents who see that education is the key to opportunity for their children. A girl named Kimberly writes: "All of my life, I am going to make good decisions. I am going to continue being a good student in school, so that I can go to the university. I

Yo tengo un regalo,
Bueno cuatro regalos
especiales, son mi papi,
Mami mi hermano y
mi hermanito. Me
los dio dios. Yo se que
es muy especial. Pero muy

want to study to be a doctor."

The second wheel reveals stories of four significant events in the child's life. Many focus on family—important for all children, but especially in Hispanic culture. Students write about holidays spent with extended families or the day a younger sibling was born. "When my sister Marisol was born," writes Adilene, "it was a very special day for my whole family and also for me because before I didn't have anyone to play with."

Often, events center on religious holidays or celebrations. Students write about "Las Posadas," the nine-day celebration leading up to Christmas, or about a sister's "quinceanera," a celebration marking a girl's 15th birthday, when she becomes a young woman in the eyes of her community. Students often write about visiting family in their or their parents' home countries. Julie, for example, writes of a trip to see her grandmother in Mexico, who owns three dogs and sells sweets out of a little store in her home.

The final layer of the wheel, visible from the opposite side, includes written descriptions of four "artifacts" from the child's life. These can include physical objects, such a favorite gift, or things more esoteric, including advice passed down from an elder. Anaibett writes: "My great grandfather gave me a chain [necklace] that had a picture of my great grandmother and me and my great grandfather. He gave me this chain in Mexico. I put it in the drawer where I put my clothes and there is where I left it in Guayameo, Mexico, in my favorite country." Julie, on the other hand, sees her family members as "gifts from God."

Throughout the layers of the wheel, illustrations highlight details of the student's prose, resulting in a wheel that reflects the child's life in words and pictures.

"Writing needs to be engaging, empowering, meaningful, and fun," says Lovato. That this project measures up on Lovato's scale is evident in the quality of student work. "Writing is such a powerful mode of expression," she says. It "truly empowers students and heightens their levels of learning when given opportunities to go through the entire writing process—brainstorm, pre-draft, rough draft, peer conferences, revisions, teacher-student conferences, and final draft for publication."

Lovato models each part of the project on a large easel at the front of the classroom, while her students gather on the magic carpet. "I model everything," she says, noting the importance of showing her students that "we are all writers." She also shows her students books that have been issued in second and third editions, evidence that even professional writers and editors go back to revise and improve their work.

Lovato also credits "Las características de la buena escritura" (known more commonly as the "Spanish Traits") developed by NWREL and tailored to the Spanish language by former NWREL assessment specialist Will Flores, as being useful in her approach to teaching writing. Flores "utilized rich Spanish language to describe each trait and also provided great ideas and many resources for writing in both areas of instruction and authentic assessment that I continuously use," Lovato says. She displays the traits on a classroom wall and says, "These are a great reference and guide for my students—and myself—to read and use over and over. Further, the Spanish traits are *not* a translation. They were developed in Spanish for Spanish writing, and take into account the differences that exist in Spanish writing."

Lovato makes a point not to correct too much in students' writing, especially early in the process. "Fixating on grammar can create roadblocks" for students, she explains. The important thing is for them to learn to express themselves—to build on strengths and then go back

See MÁGICA, Page 35

What They Remember

NORTHWEST AUTHORS LOOK BACK ON THE LESSONS THAT HAVE LASTED

By SUZIE BOSS and DENISE JARRETT WEEKS

By the time an author holds her published book in the palm of her hands, she has done the hard work of learning to write. If it's a particularly good book, she can then expect to hear questions from admiring readers: How did you learn to do this? What mattered along the way to becoming a writer?

Teachers of writing can be forgiven if they hope for the best—a kind word about a former teacher, praise for a wise mentor who brought out the gifts of the protégé. It's a story fit for Hollywood—*Finding Forrester* comes to mind (the Sean Connery role, of course, not the meanspirited English teacher).

But what happens in real life? In a high school class of 21 students in Valier, Montana, the red-headed son of a ranch hand gets a strange notion in his head, and "makes up his mind to be a writer of some kind." As Ivan Doig recalls, the inspiration to write came from wanting to escape the drudgery of ranch work. He grew up to write *Dancing at the Rascal Fair, This House of Sky,* and other fine books that capture the spirit and people of the West. Writer Anne Lamott recalls in *Bird by Bird* how it felt to have her words read aloud for the first time. She was in the second grade:

> *"It was a great moment; the other children looked at me as though I had learned to drive. . . . I understood immediately the thrill of seeing oneself in print. It provides some sort of primal verification: you are in print; therefore you exist."*

Eudora Welty, in *One Writer's Beginnings,* reports of her education: "I was always my own teacher." Others recall classroom experiences that improved their craft, and some remember best the lessons they spent years unlearning. Stephen King, in *On Writing,* recalls an early encounter with a teacher who accused him of wasting his talent on writing "junk":

> *I was ashamed. I have spent a good many years since—too many, I think—being ashamed about what I write. I think I was forty before I realized that almost every writer of fiction and poetry who has ever published a line has been accused by someone of wasting his or her God-given talent. If you write . . . someone will try to make you feel lousy about it, that's all.*

The Northwest region is blessed with many fine writers, a few of whom agreed to reflect on the writing lessons they remember—for better or worse.

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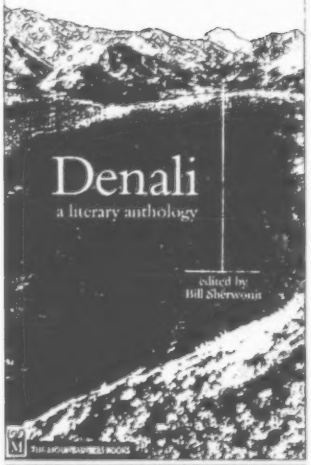

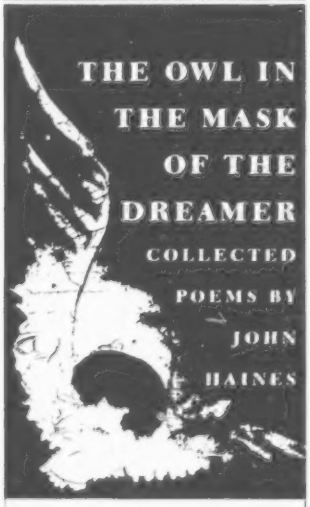

BILL SHERWONIT

SHERWONIT IS AN OUTDOORS JOURNALIST FOR THE *ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS* AND EDITOR OF *DENALI: A LITERARY ANTHOLOGY.*

In school, I was never much into writing, though I had good teachers who taught me the basics of telling a good story through the written word. I was more of a science and math guy and eventually got a master's degree in geology. But, after working awhile as a geologist, I decided I didn't want to spend my life doing that, so I returned to school and got interested in journalism—and discovered I loved it. Sports writing was my first passion, then outdoors writing. Nowadays, I'm increasingly interested in creative nonfiction, especially the personal essay. It allows me to explore my relationship with wild nature and better understand my place in the world.

Though I don't have vivid memories of learning—or loving—to write when I was young, I know that my teachers gave me the strong foundation that allows me to earn a living from writing, while also helping me, through my stories, to better understand my relationship with people and the natural world.

JOHN HAINES

AUTHOR OF *THE OWL IN THE MASK OF THE DREAMER* (1993), AND OTHER BOOKS OF POETRY, HAINES IS A FELLOW OF THE ACADEMY OF AMERICAN POETS AND A RECIPIENT OF A LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FROM THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, AMONG MANY OTHER HONORS. HE NOW LIVES IN MISSOULA, MONTANA, BUT RETURNS REGULARLY TO HIS ALASKA HOMESTEAD.

I did not learn to write as a student in a classroom or a typical "workshop." My student background was primarily in the visual arts, in painting and sculpture. My background in literature is founded on the reading I did as a boy and a young man. I was introduced to books by my father who was a good reader and who read to me from an early age. I had also one very vivid experience as a junior in high school, when our teacher introduced us to Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales*—in Middle English, not translation! Those opening lines from the Prologue to the Tales have never left me.

It is true that my years of study and work in the visual arts had considerable influence on my vision as a poet and writer, in helping me to see, to define in a visual sense the physical world in which I was involved, whether in the Alaska wilderness or the social and political environment of the city and of people. As many of my later poems can illustrate, the art fed the writing and in one way or another continues to.

I have for long understood the connection between our language, our use of words, as well as the forms we choose in our various arts, and the fundamental forms and movements of what we call Nature. I have over the years given a good deal of thought to the subject, and I owe to my years of life in the Alaska wilderness as well as the reading I've done, the understanding I've come to in my later years.

Great poetry, great music, great art take account of all the potential variety in nature: image, sound, rhythm, the play of mind, the play of ideas—all that is like the play of light, of shadow, of leaf and water in the great world. So that it becomes possible to speak of the mind as a kind of imitation, or reflection of the world.

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MOLLY GLOSS

MOLLY GLOSS, AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF *THE JUMP-OFF CREEK*, *WILD LIFE*, AND MANY SHORT STORIES AND ESSAYS, GREW UP IN WHAT WAS THEN A RURAL NEIGHBORHOOD ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF PORTLAND. SHE PLANNED TO BECOME A TEACHER BUT BAILED AFTER A MISERABLE THREE MONTHS IN THE CLASSROOM. NOW, SHE TEACHES ADULT WRITING CLASSES AT PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY.

Growing up, did you dream of becoming a writer?

I never met a living, breathing writer when I was a kid. I thought all writers were dead. So it wasn't something that occurred to me to do for a living. When I was a girl—I'm almost 58—the smart girls could become either teachers or nurses. I fainted at the sight of blood, so I planned to become a teacher. I was in my thirties before I met a living, breathing, published writer. Nowadays, it's really common for writers to be in the schools, teaching workshops, meeting with kids. But not when I was growing up.

What do you remember about being taught to write?

I know that I loved to write in elementary school. And I wrote a lot. I wrote stories, poems. I volunteered to share them with my class. I would enter contests in the *Weekly Reader* and *Scholastic*. I entered really bad poems about horses that jumped over the moon and things like that. I don't remember being taught how to write at all, not at all.

In high school, I had an English teacher I liked a lot when I was a junior. She was youngish and had trouble controlling the class. There was a lot of pandemonium, but I think she was very motivated. She had us writing a short story in collaboration, in groups of three or four. I was frustrated by the process, because I didn't have control of it. I felt like the story could have been a lot better if I could have written it myself.

Somewhere in there between sixth and eighth grade, I became very shy about my writing. I was no longer willing to share it or show it.

How about college?

I went to Portland State University and was studying to become a teacher. I took a beginning fiction class when I was a freshman or sophomore. The teacher tried to shape all of us into his own pattern. What I specifically remember, one particular thing, was that I had written a piece and, for the sake of the rhythm in the sentence, I had wanted to use a string of things and not use the word "and" before the last thing. For instance: red, white, blue. He wrote in "and" before the last word, with a note in the margin about always needing to use "and" before the last in a series. This was for fiction, mind you. When I took the paper up to him later and talked to him about that—don't I have some freedom here to experiment? —he said: "No. There are certain rules of grammar. You have to follow them. This is one of them." There were lots of incidents like that during the term.

How did you react?

That one fiction class pretty much stopped me from writing for several years. I felt, I must be wrong, then. My ear which wanted to hear this certain kind of rhythm must be wrong. It took me a long time—*years*—thinking back on that to figure out that he wasn't right. That I wasn't wrong. That I wrote well.

You really stopped writing?

I went underground. When I got married at 21, right out of college, I didn't tell my husband that I wrote. And I was still writing a little bit. I wasn't finishing anything. I would literally hide pieces in the underwear drawer. Eventually, I admitted that I was writing these little things. He wasn't appalled. He didn't say, you think *you* can be a *writer?* I don't even think I thought I could be a writer at that point.

You've written about teaching yourself to write by challenging yourself to finish a novel

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to enter in a contest. Was that how you learned?

I really do feel that I taught myself to write by writing. Not through my education. I think of writing that [first novel] as my apprenticeship.

Is there a lesson in that for writing teachers?

I don't think writing can be taught. But it can be learned. You learn it by the old-fashioned method of practicing a lot. But a teacher can provide the time and motivation, and a teacher can show you ways to get to your goal sooner. She will show you the pitfalls. The things you can avoid. Kind of steer you back onto the road if you're starting to drive off into the ditch. Teachers can be useful. I certainly benefited from one writing teacher, at least. In 1981, I took a writing workshop from Ursula LeGuin [acclaimed Portland author].

What did you learn there?

Ursula was a model for how to teach. I learned some things about editing and revision and close reading of work. I learned by the mere fact that it was set up as a peer critique group, so I was forced to try to articulate what worked and what didn't work in other people's writing. That improved my own writing tremendously.

A lot of teachers, as early as elementary grades, are using the writer's workshop model. Do you think that's a good idea?

It's risky. When I was a teenager, I was really shy. I remember showing a story to a classmate when I was in late high school. And I was just devastated because she said, "Oh yeah, this is really good but . . . ." I couldn't handle that. I wasn't ready for critique at that point. There's a certain risk attached to peer critiques. It could stop some kids from writing forever. Even in the classes I teach for adults, I make it optional if they want to share their work.

What other advice would you offer writing teachers?

I know there's a lot of emphasis now in teaching writing on the editing process. And revision. The idea is you should write a rough draft quickly. And then revise. That's fine. And kids need to know that you don't have to get it right the first time. But I'm the sort of writer who revises as she goes. I don't write a rough draft. I've never been able to do that. I revise every bit as I'm working so when I get to the end, I'm really at the end. I have a polished piece. So I think that teachers who emphasize so much the rough-draft process and then the editing need to make a tiny bit of allowance for a writer who's like me. Who may not be able to work like that. Teachers should keep that in the back of their mind.

You've written in many different styles, including Westerns, science fiction, and fantasy. What advice would you offer teachers whose students want to experiment with different genres?

Often, students writing in those genres are not writing original work based on a background in strong reading. Instead, they're writing scripts from television and film. If they're writing stories that look like they could have been ripped right off the television, they need to be drawn up short on that. You should be pushing books in their direction that would send them off in a literary direction rather than a media direction. There are lots of fantasy novels out there they would love, if they knew about them. It's a big mistake to be afraid of the fantastic imagination. You can toy with metaphor way out on the edges of things in a way you cannot do in any other genre. It's why I write in that genre from time to time. I can say things and play with ideas in a way I cannot do in any other field. Even though there's a lot of bad fantasy out there, there's a lot of really interesting, good stuff going on as well. It's valuable literature. And to be a writer of fantasy and/or science fiction is probably the most amenable field for a new writer today. You can break in more easily. If you have a student who's an active reader of that field, and actively writing it and wants to be a writer, that's a student you should be encouraging. That student may be embarking on something that actually could lead to a career.

Any last thoughts?

As far as the few, the handful who are gifted, those students are going to be good writers no matter what, eventually. They just have to get a certain age before they have anything to say. Mostly, teachers need to be focused on the mass of students who need to be able to write a good paragraph. That's a skill they'll need for the rest of their lives. As for the gifted ones, they're going to survive all kinds of teaching and become good writers.

But at the least, do no harm?

Exactly! That's the moral of the story. ☐

What Do We Do When They Speak a Language No One Understands?

By KATHERINE MCNEIL

EDITOR'S NOTE: Katherine McNeil teaches in a self-contained classroom for students with severe behavior disorders at Northwood Junior High School in Renton, Washington. Her innovative, award-winning approach draws on her own history. Through high school, she was a struggling student whose teachers called her "lazy, unmotivated, and immature." Not until age 33 did she gather the courage to enroll in college. There, she discovered that she has profound learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). She also learned that "with tremendous effort, I could learn." She has been learning ever since. In 1992, she became the first person in her family to graduate from college. In 2000, she earned a master's degree. Now, in addition to coordinating Northwood's JAG Program, which stands for Just Achieving Greatness, this Special Education teacher and behavioral specialist is enrolled in the Education Leadership doctoral program at Seattle University.

At one time or another, they have been in every classroom in this nation. Voices in the staff lounge carry the stories of frustration and anger in dealing with "them." They are the bane of the educational system. Who are they? They are students with behavior disorders.

Oh, the stories I have heard about these students. At various times, educators, administrators, and the public have offered numerous comments and solutions to what ails these students. One educator told me, "The only thing these kids need is some good ol' butt whippin' to straighten them up." When I told him that most of these students have been verbally, physically, and sexually abused and that corporal punishment has accomplished little, he just said that if they come into his classroom, they will either shape up or he will ship them out.

Another time a teacher told me that no teacher should be made to teach "those" kids. "I don't have enough time as it is to deal with 'regular' kids. I don't know what they need. But they are not going to come into my classroom and screw it up for the others." Sitting with administrators, some teachers lament the never-ending referral of students for placement into programs for students with behavior disor They wonde ~ lor ow it is that referrals mirror the ational statistics: male, student olor, single-parent household, and of lower socioeconomic status. This is followed by the question: "Why?"

I have no solution to the larger problem. But I know why. Most educators, parents, administrators do not understand that these students are speaking loud and clear. Their language, however, is not understood by many. They tell a teacher Monday morning when they arrive at school that their father has beaten them over the weekend. How do they communicate this? This is a dialogue that I recently had with a student:

*Monday morning 7:30 a.m.: A male student, 15, walks through my classroom door. "Good morning. How did your weekend go?" He looks at me with fire in his eyes and replies, "Fu** You, Bi*ch." My heart sinks as I reply to him in a quiet voice, "I'm sorry you're angry. You know that language is not appropriate, but I am here if you need someone to talk to."*

This student rarely spoke to me in this manner, but I understood his language all too well. You see, I used to speak in his language. He behaved in this manner every time his mother let his father move back in. The family has a history of verbal and physical abuse. Being the oldest, he has borne the brunt of his father's drug- and alcohol-induced rages. Simply, behavior is language, and a powerful language, which few can translate.

Their stories make my heart ache. Students who enter my program have very little desire to be in school. The common threads that run through all the stories are pain, rejection, isolation, and academic failure. When our team convenes an intake meeting, these students view me uneasily and with a great amount of distrust. I ask them what their previous educational experience has been like. Students usually end their stories by looking directly in my eyes. They search to see what my eyes tell them. I just smile and nod with deep understanding.

What they hear next is "the promise." I promise each student who enters my program that every day they enter my classroom they are guaranteed four things:

1. They will be loved and told they are loved by myself and my staff.
2. They will be cared for and told they are cared about by myself and my staff.
3. Each day is a new day . . . a chance for a do-over. Nothing is held against them.
4. If my staff or myself ever makes a mistake that impacts them, we will publicly apologize to them.

Over the past three years as I have made these promises, I have seen cold hard stares replaced by quizzical looks or even with ones of hope. These are students whom other teachers do not want, and they know this. I welcome each and every one of them to my program. Yes, there have been students who have en-

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tered my program with what I can only describe as having wild behaviors. I have been bitten, kicked, hit, spit at, and threatened. However, I never lower my expectations for academic and behavioral excellence. I will never, ever give up on any student. I know all too well that their behavior is language. They speak loud and clear about the injustices that they have had to endure during their brief lives. These young men and women should be celebrating the joys of life, but many just try to survive the ravages of verbal and sexual abuse, dysfunctional families, substance abuse, and absent parents.

This program is different. When a student steps into the classroom, the first thing he notices is how this environment is drastically different from any other BD classroom he may have been in. It has been my experience that most BD classrooms are filled with broken tables and chairs. The curriculum consists of cast-offs from out-of-date district surplus items. And in many instances, there is no regular Special Education teacher, only a revolving door of substitutes. All of these situations give the students the message that they are not worth the investment. It is my heartfelt belief that the needs of these students have been put off for way too long.

I refuse to wait any longer for funding to meet the needs of my students, even if that means spending my personal funds. During the past three years, I have purchased computers with my own money to supplement the two that the school provides. However, each student in a class of 15 now has a computer to facilitate his or her learning. That means they don't have to wait their turn at the computer to capture an idea in words or revise their writing until it's in polished form. They don't have to go to the computer lab where, in a less structured environment, behaviors can escalate. In our classroom, they learn history from a variety of primary sources. They are able to read, understand, and write about the plays of Shakespeare by using technology to support their learning. And through grant writing, we have assembled the equipment they can use to build and program robots.

Children are guided by the adults in their lives, and these young people need to have hope that there are adults who understand and care—adults who have a plan for success in their lives, adults they can trust. Children live up to the standards that are set before them. In a caring, secure environment these students can once again reach for the sky, despite their backgrounds, disability, and previous learning experience.

To learn more about Northwood's JAG Program, visit the program Web site at www.seanet.com/~kmcneil/JAG. To read more about how McNeil has used technology to help her students understand and write about the plays of William Shakespeare, check out www.intel.education/odyssey (Day 209). □

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Continued from Page 29

and address the nits in revisions. A parallel can be drawn to helping these students learn to express themselves in their native language first and then weave in English, rather than force them to communicate in English at the outset where they will likely find the new language to be a barrier to expression.

"The writing process seems long at times," Lovato says, "but it is well worth it. My students learn so much."

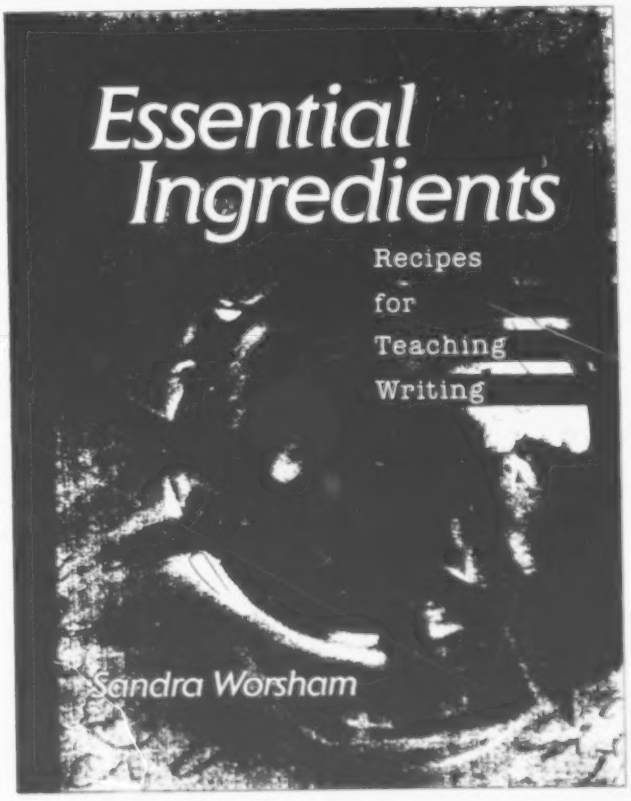
At the end of the Tree of Life project, Lovato hangs the student wheels from a large construction paper tree in the breezeway outside the classroom during the school's "Celebration of Learning" so that other students and visiting parents can enjoy and appreciate her students' hard work. "One of the beauties of this project," she surmises, "is that it fully embraced my students —their language, culture, and family traditions. They loved it because it was about them, and they all took great pride in their projects."

Of the year's work, Lovato says, "It was a huge success in that nearly half of my students were either not reading or writing—or were at the beginning stages—in any language at the beginning of the year." By the end of the year, she reports, all were reading and writing in their native language of Spanish, and most were reading and writing in English as well. Of course, reaching grade-level proficiency is a long process for ELL students, taking several years, Lovato notes. But she adds, "First language literacy is what opened the door, and truly makes all the difference." □

THE TESTING TRAP: *How State Writing Assessments Control Learning* by George Hillocks Jr. (2002, Teachers College Press): This provocative new book from a longtime researcher on writing instruction takes an indepth look at writing assessments in five states: Illinois, Kentucky, New York, Oregon, and Texas. Hillocks starts from the premise that writing is not a linear proposition but rather a recursive process of refining ideas. In his view, the writer moves not in a straight line from start to finish but rather cycles back to make revisions and improvements that incorporate additional ideas, data, or analysis discovered through the writing process. The strategies of inquiry, he suggests, "are the same strategies that writers need in producing the content of writing."

Hillocks suggests that effective writing assessments encourage students' development as writers rather than restricting their work to formulaic, five-paragraph essays that must be produced without adequate time for revision. Kentucky's use of a writing portfolio for assessment provides "a model for imitation. It avoids the formulaic, treats writing as a meaningful and serious pursuit for students, engenders a rich writing program, and provides for the professional development of teachers who must do far more than teach students to fill out schematic diagrams."

Oregon's writing assessment also receives praise for including a variety of writing styles, including narrative, imaginative, expository, and persuasive. Such variety "signals a richer, more diverse writing program," Hillocks concludes. Oregon also includes voice as an element worth scoring, another factor that guards against formulaic writing.



Hillocks concludes with suggestions for improving writing instruction by providing adequate time and resources for teachers to teach writing well.

WRITING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE: *Classroom Projects for Community Change*, edited by Chris Benson, Scott Christian, Dixie Goswami, and Walter Gooch (Teachers College Press, 2002): Many teachers have noticed that students are motivated to write well when they know their words will reach an audience beyond the classroom. This new book goes deeper with the idea of writing for the community. Chapters describe projects—including some from the Northwest region—that engage students in community research as the starting point for writing. The writing process expands in such projects to include the step of field-testing. Field-tests show students how readers actually use their document. This feedback guides revision to create a more effective piece of writing.

Editor Chris Benson suggests that writing for the community has an additional benefit beyond encouraging good writing: "This method gives students a voice in their community. . . . Writing is the motor that pushes activism and advocacy. Without articulate writing or speaking, activism and advocacy amount to no more than wish-making."

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS: *Recipes for Teaching Writing* by Sandra Worsham (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001): Award-winning teacher Sandra Worsham makes a powerful case for teaching young writers to appeal to the senses, make use of their sense of place, draw on their memories and personal stories, and be willing to experiment with new approaches to make writing better. She follows her own advice in *Essential Ingredients*, which weaves together classroom-tested advice about writing instruction with stories (and recipes) Worsham remembers from her mother's kitchen. Along with ideas for writing assignments and many examples of student writing, she includes a chapter on creating a classroom atmosphere that's "right for writing."

CRAFT LESSONS: *Teaching Writing K–8* by Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi (Stenhouse, 1998): A perennial favorite among language arts teachers, *Craft Lessons* outlines 78 mini-lessons to guide student writers through the writing process, from brainstorming through revision and on to editing a final draft. Lessons are arranged developmentally (K–2, 3–4, and 5–8). Each lesson includes guidelines for teachers to consider, including a brief discussion of reasons for teaching a particular element, a "how to teach it" suggestion, and a listing of resources to support the concept. An appendix includes examples of student writing.

—Suzie Boss

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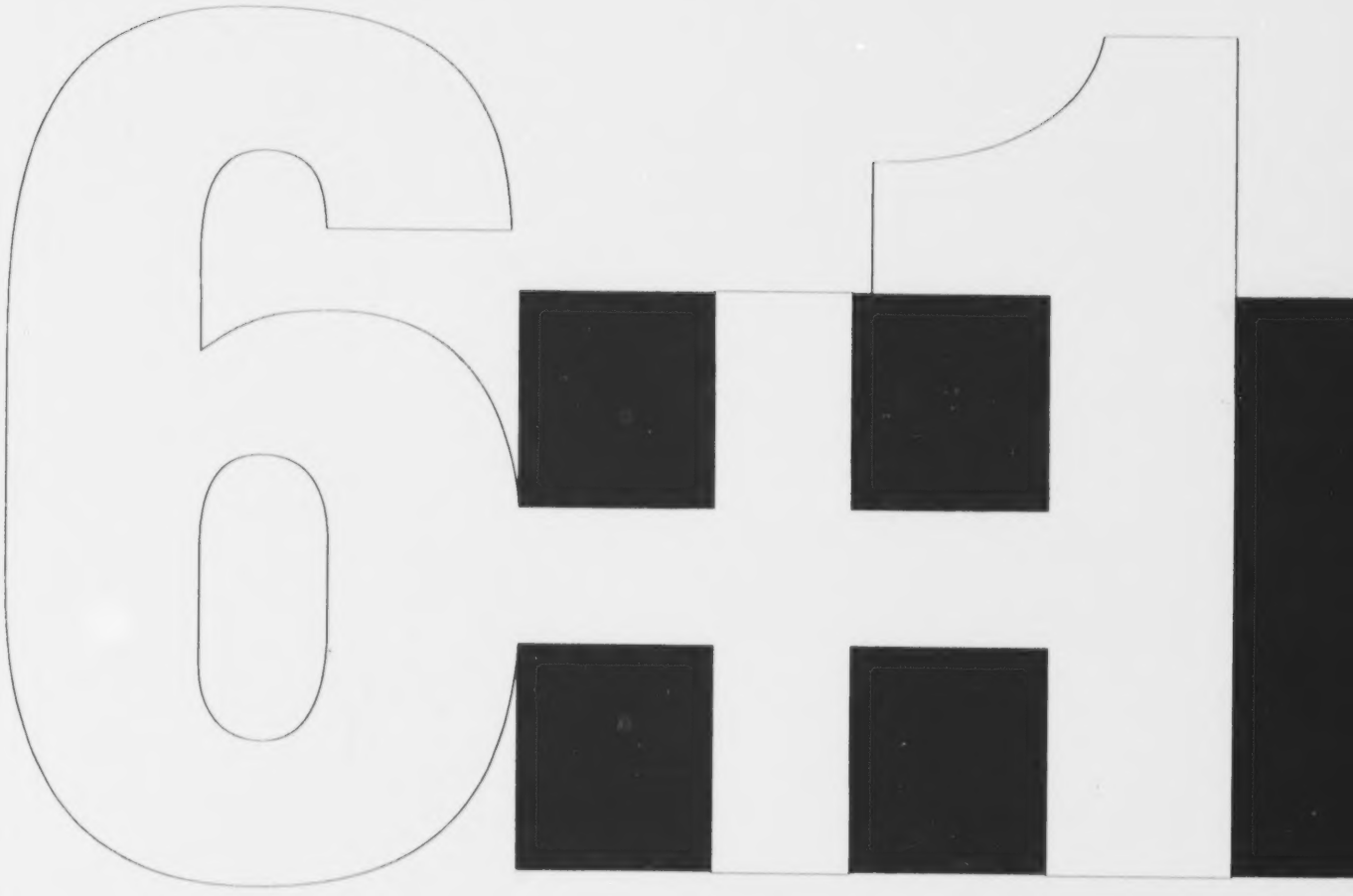

Traits of Writing Assessment

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

A SPECIAL SECTION FROM

NW EDUCATION

SPECIAL SECTION: 6+1 Traits of Writing Assessment

ARTICLES

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Welcome to this special section of *Northwest Education*, focusing on the 6+1 Trait™ Writing Assessment and Instruction Model.

The model began to take shape nearly 20 years ago, sparked by the collaborative effort of dedicated teachers. These pioneers in writing assessment knew that there was more to teaching writing than simply grading grammar and other mechanics. They also knew that giving a student's paper a single score—a holistic grade—didn't provide much in the way of specific feedback that a young writer could use to revise and improve her work. Teachers wanted an analytic model that would assess specific aspects of student writing. But what might such a model look like?

These determined educators began by tackling a basic question: What is good writing? One group of teachers met regularly in Beaverton, Oregon. Another got together to brainstorm in Montana. They compared reams of student work and discussed the qualities or traits that all "good" writing samples shared. Six traits emerged as the cornerstones of quality writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. Later, presentation was added to the list. Eventually, scoring guides, or rubrics, were developed to assess the level of proficiency in each of the traits.

Since those early days, the 6+1 Trait™ Writing Assessment and Instruction Model has gained popularity around the globe. Teachers in every state and in many nations use the traits to help their students become better writers, confident about their ability to improve their own writing through careful revision. Several states also draw on the model for statewide writing assessments.

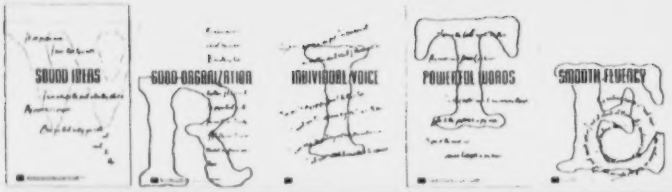
The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory has played a central role in supporting the effective use of the 6+1 Trait™ Writing Assessment and Instruction Model. NWREL publishes a growing collection of materials to support the effective use of the traits in the classroom. In addition, NWREL experts provide training institutes around the country, and sometimes far beyond our borders, to explain how to use 6+1 Trait™ rubrics and scoring criteria, integrate writing assessment into everyday instruction, and use teaching strategies that connect the model to the world of the developing writer.

Ruth Culham, NWREL's leading 6+1 Trait™ expert and author, has been helping to shape and refine the model since those early days, and has seen interest skyrocket in recent months. To meet rising demand, NWREL has entered into new partnerships to publish and distribute 6+1 Trait™ materials. Culham has written a comprehensive teacher's guide to the traits, released this fall by Scholastic Inc. (See Page 2 for more details.)

As the line of products continues to grow to meet demand, one thing hasn't changed. Promises Culham: "Teachers remain our inspiration."

This special section provides a behind-the-scenes look at the 6+1 Trait™ Writing Assessment and Instruction Model. We introduce you to the Vanguards, a group of veteran teachers who are invited to meet annually to share ideas, keep their message consistent, and maintain the grassroots spirit that has been part of this model since the beginning. We accompany Culham to a school in Alaska that is using the model as part of schoolwide improvement efforts. We describe a brand-new effort to modify the model for use at the Indiana School for the Deaf, an example of how the traits can be adapted to serve specific populations. And we highlight the newest products, all designed to help teachers, students, and parents share a common vocabulary to talk about the writing process.

ABOUT THIS SECTION



6+1 TRAITS OF WRITING ASSESSMENT

ON THE SAME PAGE

WRITING ASSESSMENT VANGUARDS MAINTAIN CONSISTENCY FROM COAST TO COAST.

By SUZIE BOSS

Contrary to popular myth, there are no six-trait police roving the world's classrooms, enforcing the proper way to assess word choice, organization, and all the rest. Instead, a select group of veteran writing teachers and trainers works collaboratively to keep the 6+1 Trait™ Writing Assessment and Instruction Model "on the same page," whether it's being used in Delaware or Denver, Texas or Tokyo.

Since 1994, the Writing Assessment Vanguards have been convening for an annual invitational summer conference. This year's event in Portland, Oregon, was a typically enthusiastic affair, with Vanguards traveling from all corners of the country to share ideas about what makes for good writing assessment. Participants describe the annual session as a shot in the arm, invigorating their teaching with fresh ideas and giving them a chance to reflect on their own evolution as educators.

Ruth Culham, who coordinates six-traits assessment for the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, says assembling this team of expert teachers and trainers is essential, "because all of a sudden, the whole country is doing 6+1 Traits™. We're seeing an exponential leap, so it's more important than ever to connect and reinforce what we're doing." Culham and Janice Wright from NWREL's assessment program maintain a busy travel schedule, conducting institutes on the traits all over the country. To meet increasing demand for training, Culham often refers local school districts or state agencies to her colleagues from the Vanguards. With so many players involved, Culham says, the network of experts "helps keep our message on point."

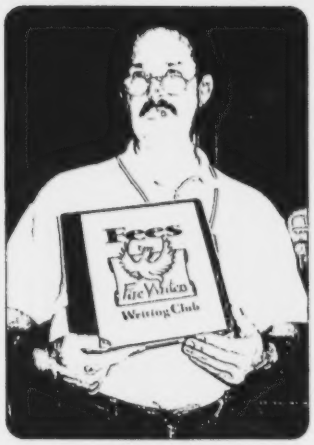
This collaborative approach to quality control is in keeping with the grassroots spirit that led to the development of the traits two decades ago. As Culham recounts, teachers who taught writing back in the 1980s were growing frustrated with multiple-choice assessments that tended to focus only on mechanics, or holistic assessments that graded the overall impact of a piece of work but failed to give specific guidance for improvement. Teachers who sought a better model began by asking, "What is good writing? What are the parts and pieces, the criteria of quality writing?" Working on similar tasks in different communities, teachers from Oregon, Montana, and elsewhere compared reams of student work and discussed the qualities or traits that all "good" writing samples shared. Six traits emerged as the cornerstones of quality writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions. Later, presentation was added to the list.

During the two decades since then, as the 6+1 Trait™ framework has spread from Oregon to every state and to many countries around the world, maintaining consistency has become a challenge. Culham and her Vanguard cohorts often find themselves debunking myths about the traits. Most common: mistaking the traits for a *program* to teach writing. Far from it, Culham stresses. "They are a tool to use with your writing program, which we believe ought to be firmly

aligned with the writing process."

One of the highlights of the annual conference is the chance for Vanguards to share examples of how they are seeing the traits used effectively in the real world of the classroom. David Pelto, who recently retired after a career of teaching high school in Alaska, summed up his experience of using the assessment model over the long term: "I can look back at student writing samples I've been collecting since I started using this model and see how my students' work has improved. The level of excellence has steadily gone up in their work. As a teacher, I have changed along with my students."

As the following examples illustrate, there's no shortage of good ideas for using the traits to complement a well-designed writing program. "Once teachers know the traits well," Culham points out, "the link to instruction becomes clear. This is where the real fun begins."



JIM BLASINGAME: TEACHING FUTURE TEACHERS TO LOVE THE TRAITS

Jim Blasingame first bumped into the 6+1 Traits™ of writing assessment a decade ago. "It was a coincidence," admits the Arizona State University English professor, but a fortuitous one. He went on to write his doctoral dissertation about the traits and now helps future teachers understand the role of effective assessment in developing the skills of young writers. A former high school English teacher, Blasingame also consults with school districts and provides indepth training sessions to teachers interested in learning how to use the traits to improve their instruction.

In an ASU course called Methods of Teaching Writing, Blasingame devotes about half the term to teaching about the 6+1 Trait™ model. ASU students—most of them preparing for teaching careers—are enthusiastic when they begin to see how the traits support sound writing instruction. "They tell me: This is the first class I've taken that has given me concrete things I can do in the classroom," he says.

To give preservice teachers more opportunities to put theory into practice, Blasingame helped launch an after-school writing club at Fees Middle School in Tempe. Here, his college students tutor middle-schoolers who voluntarily come to the club to work on writing projects. The club is part of the school's 21st Century Community Learning Center and also has been supported by a seed grant from Motorola. "It's a laboratory for new teachers to see what works," Blasingame explains. "They come up with ideas for writing activities, then go over their plans with me or my graduate assistant. We look for potential hazards or obstacles. Then they try it, with real-live kids. Any rough spots present themselves quickly."

Young writers benefit, Blasingame says, when they are coached to use "a nice, smooth sequence of steps" to improve their writing. "First, they need something interesting to grab their attention at 2:30 in the afternoon. Usually it's a product from the real world, something for them to sink their teeth into—a travel brochure, poem, menu, creative story." Calling themselves the Fees Fire Writers, they have even launched a school newspaper, which provides the added motivation of writing for a real audience.

Typically, the ASU tutor presents a writing activity that highlights some facet of the traits, such as voice or word choice. Instead of just making an assignment and turning the student loose to write, however, the tutor takes time to model how she did a similar project. That shows the middle-school student that "any finished piece has been through a long process, including revising and editing," notes Blasingame. "It's important for kids to see that tutors do the same steps, and sometimes even struggle a little."

For the college students, the hands-on experience is a confidence booster. As one ASU student shared in an evaluation of the program: "My limited preparations to be a teacher had never before involved actual students. So a large part of what I have learned from this project is what real students are capable of. They are creative, and funny, and have a unique perspective on the world." Added another: "It was exciting to watch students who were uninterested and apprehensive about writing blossom into eager writers as the semester came to an end."

Veteran teachers often make similar observations when they take a training session to learn about the six traits. Blasingame summarizes teachers' most-common reactions:

- "When they hear about the traits, they agree: This is what makes good writing. Vivid details, a lead that grabs the reader's attention, voice that takes a risk—these are descriptions they already use, or know intuitively. What they see is that this is an organized system for using those concepts about good writing.
- "The traits don't replace or usurp anything. Teachers realize that they can use this model with what's already in their curriculum. It adapts to what

you're doing already and makes you more effective as a teacher.

◦ "This gives teachers concrete things to do with their students. Many teachers say they've never taken a class on how to teach writing. As a result, many avoided it or have been frustrated in figuring out how they can help kids be better writers."

One of the most useful aspects of the assessment model, Blasingame says, "is that it provides teachers with a method for teaching revision that's not just about conventions. Students tend to think that rewriting is about correcting spelling or fixing grammar. With the traits, you can walk through the revision process with a model that students can understand. When they're polishing a piece, they can go down the list," looking for ways to improve on each of the traits. As a result, he adds, "You get meaningful revision instead of just proofreading."

Both struggling writers and students who are producing more polished work stand to gain from such informed feedback, Blasingame adds. "If reluctant writers can be more successful, these students become less reluctant to write. An activity that focuses on using a trait or two can help them enjoy that success. And for students who turn in work that's wonderful, the teacher might focus only on the misspelled word and not reward the student for other aspects that are good." The six-trait model "gives teachers a way to recognize what's good in a piece of writing and what needs more work."

URSULA WHITE: SHARING 'AHA!' MOMENTS

Ursula White had been teaching elementary school for about three years when she first encountered the 6+1 Trait™ model. At the time, she was teaching in the Clover Park School District in Washington. A class on the traits was offered as part of a summer professional development institute. That introduction left her eager to start putting the traits to work in her own classroom. "It just made sense to me," she recalls, "It was an 'Aha!' When I went back into my classroom, I started dabbling."

White's enthusiasm spread to the next classroom, where a colleague also began experimenting with the assessment model. Their district gave them both time to observe teachers in the Kent School District where the traits had been implemented districtwide. Says White, "I could see the value of using the same vocabulary to talk about writing across grade levels." She and her colleague needed no more convincing of the model's value. "We just grabbed on and made it our own."

When a family move took White to the other side of the country a few years later, she took her enthusiasm for the traits along with her. At Hartly Elementary near Dover, Delaware, where she was hired in the fall of 1998, "no one had ever heard of the traits." White's new principal stopped in her classroom to observe and found a roomful of third-graders deeply engaged in the revision process. "My principal was amazed at my kids' ability to take a piece of writing that was weak and move it to something stronger, using the strategies and vocabulary of the traits." The principal called White in for a follow-up conference. "She could see the benefits this offered to the whole staff."

With her principal's blessing, White wrote a grant to cover the cost of 6+1 Trait™ training materials and books for the entire faculty, and led her new colleagues in an introduction to the traits. Teachers began meeting after school to talk in more depth about the assessment model. At staff meetings, the principal encouraged teachers to share examples of how they were using the traits across grade levels. "It became a team effort," White says, "not just me on a pulpit. And then it really took off." Teachers began inviting her into their classrooms to model a lesson or coach them in the use of rubrics. "That's when I realized they were on board."

It didn't take long for word to spread beyond the school. When statewide writing assessments were tallied that year, Hartly Elementary third-graders had the highest scores in the state. And when the scores were broken down to the classroom level, White's students emerged as the highest-ranking young writers in Delaware.

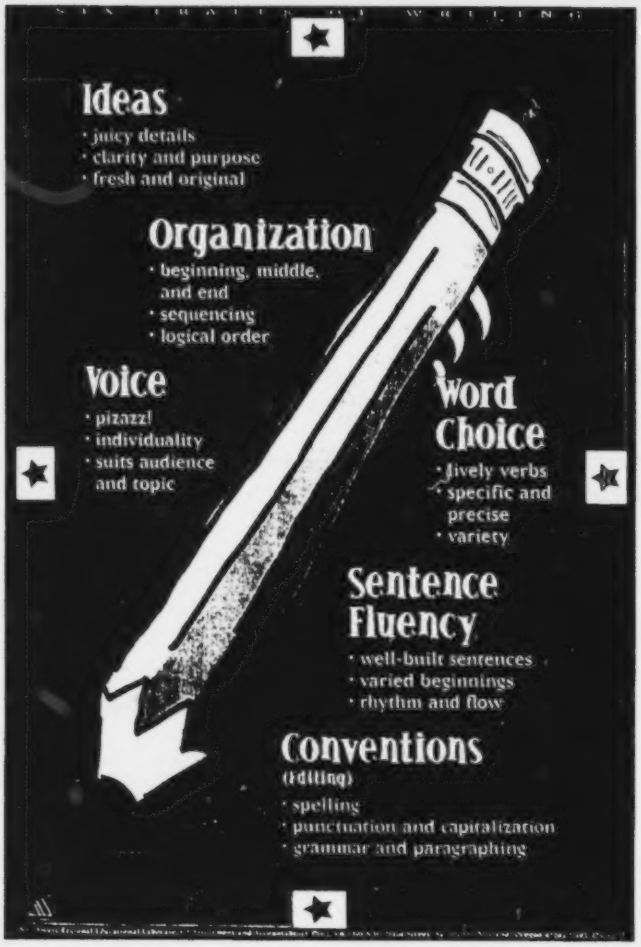
Despite her success, White was eager to continue learning more about the traits. She and a Delaware colleague attended an intensive three-day training taught by Ruth Culham. They drew on their deeper understanding as they began to deliver 6+1 Trait™ training throughout their school district. White also was serving on her district's English and Language Arts Committee, and found herself sharing examples of how the model had helped in her teaching and in her personal development as a writer.

After another family move this year, White decided to give up her own classroom and devote her time to training fellow teachers. Through the Delaware Professional Development Center, she has delivered 6+1 Trait™ training to teachers from across the state. She's often in their classrooms, too, coaching and modeling for other teachers as they gain experience using the traits with their students. "Teachers need repetition and classroom examples. You can't get it all from a workshop," White says. She has credibility with other teachers "because they know I've been in the thick of it, in the classroom. I know how busy teachers are. It took a lot of work and development for me to learn about the traits, and other teachers appreciate that."

Although it's been years since her first introduction to the traits, White still gets excited when she sees another teacher experience the same "Aha!" that ignited her own passion. And she's thrilled when she sees a student take on more independence and confidence as

a writer. Parents share their enthusiasm for the traits when they hear their children pointing out the excellent word choice in a storybook or focus on improving the sentence fluency in the stories they write at home. "Parents can see their children becoming more confident writers."

In a recent training session, White happened to meet a seventh-grade teacher who had been hearing about the traits from his own students. It turns out that several of them had been in White's class in elementary school. They were eager to talk about word choice, voice, organization, and other elements of good writing as they tackled assignments in middle school. "This will carry with them," White says. "It's a lifelong skill." □



SERVING DIVERSE AUDIENCES

WHEN THE INDIANA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF SEEKS HELP TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS, IT DISCOVERS THE 6+1 TRAIT™ MODEL. THE REST IS HISTORY.

By SUZIE BOSS

INDIANAPOLIS, Indiana—As a veteran trainer with the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's assessment program, Janice Wright has traveled the country to teach teachers how to use the 6+1 Trait™ Writing Assessment and Instruction Model. She's explained the model in big cities, small towns, classrooms, conference centers, just about everywhere—or so she thought.

This fall, Wright received an invitation to present a 6+1 Trait™ training session for teachers at the Indiana School for the Deaf (ISD). Wright recognized the opportunity to help make history. "This would be the first time we've introduced the model for use with deaf students," she explains. By coincidence, Wright also has experience in Deaf Education. She was a student teacher years ago at the Oregon School for the Deaf, and later was an itinerant teacher for deaf students in Central Oregon. She was excited by the chance to help adapt the model to meet the learning needs of this special population of students. "It seemed like a wonderful opportunity."

The Indiana School for the Deaf, a 320-student residential school, serves students from preschool through 12th grade. Teachers and students use American Sign Language.

Gary Mowl, chairperson for school improvement planning, explains that the school has been seeking to improve student performance in the area of language arts. When members of the language arts committee began exploring how other public schools in Indiana have made strides in improving student writing, they kept seeing references to something called the six traits. That made them curious. Through further investigation, they learned how the 6+1 Trait™ assessment model enables teachers to give students specific feedback about their writing. Guided by the traits, students become more confident writers, better equipped to reach for excellence.

Mowl's research led him to NWREL, which provides a wide variety of materials and training to support the use of the 6+1 Trait™ model. And he also found Wright. "It was by mere coincidence that Janice had background in Deaf Education," he explains. Together, they began mapping out a two-day workshop for ISD's language arts teachers.

ADAPTING THE MODEL

Going into the workshop, Wright knew that she would have to rethink some aspects of the 6+1 Trait™ model. Deaf students, she explains, tend to be quite literal. "Things that play to the ear—word play—may not make sense to them." Children who are deaf or hard of hearing may not have large vocabularies. "Often, they didn't get read to as young children," she explains, which means they may have missed opportunities to build their vocabulary and other literacy skills. From experience, Wright also appreciated the importance of using visual models rather than auditory examples in the workshops.

Perhaps most important, she understood that deaf students share many of the characteristics of English language learners. At the Indiana School for the Deaf, "they teach the students using their first language, American Sign Language," Wright explains. Rather than being a signed version of English, ASL has its own constructs and patterns. "It's grammatically different from English. Deafness is a culture, not a disability. Deaf kids are ELL kids. That's really important."

NWREL has a track record of adapting the 6+1 Trait™ model to fit the needs of English language learners. Native Spanish speakers, in particular, have been served by an adaptation of the traits for effective Spanish writing. Wright borrowed from this research base, which supports teaching students to write well in their native language first, then take those skills into writing in English.

Because the workshop would be a pilot project, Wright asked Mowl and his colleagues to be patient. "This involved a lot of learning for me," Wright admits, "and they were willing to work with me to help me change and adapt the model so that it will work for them and their students."

POSITIVE RESPONSE

When it was time for the two-day workshop, Wright found herself in front of an audience of about 20 teachers, plus two interpreters. "They had to remind me to talk more slowly, and to really slow down when reading aloud," she says. There was plenty of give-and-take, as well, with Wright asking the teachers for input about how the model could be modified to better suit their students' needs. Overall, she adds, "it was a wonderful experience."

Mowl says teacher response was "superb." Teachers were enthusiastic about the concepts, the materials, the

videos, and Wright's presentations. Many have already started using the traits in their classrooms.

Carol Keller, a middle school language arts teacher, said after the session: "The ideas in the notebook were wonderful and very helpful. It will be beneficial for both the teachers and students to learn and work on these traits one by one. Our students have always been weak on peer tutoring, and this will give them a good base for assessing themselves and others." In the past, she says, she has had to skip over peer review during the writing process. "Now, I'm hoping to incorporate this skill in my lessons."

Sharon Baker, a high school language arts teacher, began introducing the traits to her students right after the training session. She says: "Using the traits in class has shown to be quite useful and beneficial for me, as well as my students. It lessens the burden of checking for every single problem within their writing. Now we can focus on one or two areas at a time, and it is a little less overwhelming. Students are not getting a paper that is full of red circles because they know we are working on one specific area at a time."

As part of her visit to Indiana, Wright also conducted an evening workshop to explain the 6+1 Trait™ model to parents. Mary Dall is a mother of three children, two hearing and one deaf. She explains why she found the session so useful: "My older hearing children always had some kind of rubric tool to measure their writings. They always seemed to do just fine. It was not until I attended the workshop on the 6+1 Traits™ that I had a better understanding of what rubric systems are all about! This workshop has actually opened my eyes in terms of how to review my son's writings. For my son and me, English is our second language. Ah, I am much, much older than he is and have had plenty of practice. I was never too sure how to go about looking at my son's writing and how to go about 'correcting' his grammar. This tool has given me a very, very nice way to approach him in our discussion. No longer do I really have to focus on his grammar, which I know will develop over time. This workshop has taught me other areas of more importance to discuss."

LESSONS THAT LAST

Such positive responses resonate with Wright, who remembers her own introduction to the traits a decade ago. She was teaching in a small school district when Oregon adopted the model for statewide writing assessment. Wright was called on to revise the language arts curriculum and thought to herself, "Here we go again . . . ."

But far from being a passing fad, the 6+1 Trait™ model offered her lasting insights into how children learn to write. "I taught myself to use the traits, and they changed the way I started teaching. I saw wonderful results for my kids," she recalls. "The key was respecting kids as writers, giving responsibility back to them. If the teacher stops being the kids' editor, they will take on that responsibility for themselves. I also began to see the value of encouraging them to write for an audience, for a purpose, for their own reasons."

Before long, Wright had transformed her teaching style. "We turned my class into a writing community. We were all doing publishing—students and teacher alike. And we were all respecting each other as writers." The 6+1 Trait™ model offered students a common vocabulary for giving one another helpful feedback, she says, "so we could build on our strengths."

Wright's early experience in Deaf Education also shaped her classroom style. "You have to break it down into steps, chunk it out. You can't assume deaf students know what you mean," she says, "when you talk about conventions or word choice or conclusion. You have to explain the concept, give a mini-lesson so you're sure they understand." Looking back, Wright can see how "being a teacher of deaf kids made me a better teacher of hearing kids, too."

Now, when she's training other teachers to use the 6+1 Trait™ model, Wright often draws on her own classroom experiences. "You don't hand a paper back to a student and say: 'Revise this.' You might say: 'Let's look at how often you used this word. Is there another word you could substitute?' Or: 'Let's took a look at the lead paragraph. How could you bring the reader in better?' Once you finish, it's going to be so much stronger."

When she sees teachers getting excited about using the model to inform their instruction, Wright also knows that big changes may be in store for them. "It causes you to examine how you teach. You may wind up asking yourself, 'Do I teach this way because it's how I've always taught writing, or is this really the best way for kids?'"

MORE QUESTIONS AHEAD

The successful introduction of the 6+1 Trait™ model at Indiana School for the Deaf has opened the door to new questions and new research. Wright, Mowl, and ISD Principal Robert Kovatch are now working together to gather examples of "authentic student writing by deaf and hard of hearing students for further analysis," Mowl explains.

The examples of student writing typically used in 6+1 Trait™ training "look nothing like what deaf students are producing," Wright notes. "It's not like what teachers see in class," at schools working with deaf students. Developing a larger sample of work by deaf students should help these pioneering teachers develop effective classroom strategies, and turn their school into a community of capable writers. □

WISHING ON A STAR

MANY ARE HOMELESS. A THIRD ARE LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE. MOST ARE GROWING UP AMID POVERTY. AT AN ANCHORAGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WHERE STUDENTS FACE EXTRAORDINARY CHALLENGES, TEACHERS FOCUS ON WRITING AS A SKILL THAT CAN TRANSFORM LIVES.

Story and photos by
DENISE JARRETT WEEKS

Writing opens a two-way portal between cultures, says bilingual teacher Enrique Quintero.

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—It had the taste of melted toothpaste. He spat it out as he looked again at the label on the bottle. It read "beer," an English word he readily recognized, but it was a bottle of root beer he'd chosen from the college cafeteria, not the *cerveza* he'd grown up drinking with his family at the dinner table. A proud young man, he nevertheless felt the hot discomfort of embarrassment as he sat, alone, in the crowded cafeteria.

It was the 1970s, and Enrique Quintero had just arrived in the United States from Ecuador. Back home in Quito, the capital of that country, the young Quintero and other students had rebelled noisily against the military dictatorship. His parents had sent him here, to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill—out of harm's way—where, an impassioned idealist, he was going to study political science. Yet here he sat, his first day at college, withdrawn and uncertain of his place. He hadn't even been sure where to sit; all the black kids were sitting on one side of the room and all the white kids on the other. He'd taken an empty seat in the middle.

Quintero, now 51 and a bilingual teacher for some of Anchorage's poor-

est children at North Star Elementary School, laughs, remembering that day. It's a funny story as he tells it, but he's making a point. Even coming from relative privilege and having English skills, he'd felt frustrated and isolated behind a language and culture barrier. It cut an indelible impression in his memory, and he thinks of that episode sometimes as he teaches some of the youngest who've found themselves strangers in a strange land.

"Children adapt faster than adults to new cultural settings, but that doesn't mean they don't go through hard times. This is a huge school," he says of North Star's 530-student population in which 29 different languages are spoken and two-thirds of students live in poverty. "Most of these [bilingual] students come from a rural place. Some have never been to school before. Everything is different, from the way the classroom looks to the clothes, the food, and the sounds. Then, they go home to something that's no longer the way it used to be, either."

TELLING THEIR STORIES

Perhaps more than others, bilingual children struggle with identity. "Teachers need to be aware of that and to open spaces in their classrooms for these kids to have existential identities," says Quintero, "which is difficult when you are out of one culture and not quite in the other culture."

Allowing children to tell their own stories, particularly in writing, is one of the surest ways to help them reveal their true selves, he says. "Writing is the most difficult thing to teach [bilingual] students, but writing—more than speaking—gets closest to *meaning*. You can get closer to a person through his writing than by talking with him."

That's because the act of writing enriches your thinking, Quintero says. When you write, you make all kinds of choices—about vocabulary, ideas, organization—that reveal your deeper thoughts and personality. You layer meaning, connect ideas, make revisions, all with the building blocks of words, grammar, and syntax. And this artifact of your thinking is evidence of who you *are*.

Even if they speak minimal English, bilingual students can use language—their home language as well as their emerging English skills—to share their own stories and ideas in the classroom. This speeds them along their way to mastering English and taking their places in society, says Quintero.

At North Star, Quintero and other teachers use the 6+1 Trait™ Writing model, a nonprescriptive approach for teaching and assessing writing that draws on students' own ideas and experiences. The model, developed by classroom teachers and writing experts from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), has helped to create a common vocabulary in the school for talking about the aspects of good writing. From kindergarten through sixth grade, students and teachers know what is meant by these traits: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation. This common vocabulary not only crosses grade levels, it crosses languages as well.

"The guiding concepts around which you organize the writing process are applicable for any language," Quintero says. This transferability has been vitally important here, in one of the most language-diverse schools in an increasingly diverse school district. Children living in Anchorage, a city of about 260,000, are increasingly from Mexico, Korea, Vietnam, Ukraine, Romania, South America—from any place in the world. In four years, predicts the Anchorage School District, ethnic minority students may well comprise the majority of the student population.

A WELCOMING PLACE

While a third of North Star's students do not speak English at home, many do not have homes at all. Fifty children of homeless families are attending North Star Elementary this year. They are delivered to the school's door each morning by vans from local homeless shelters or by city bus, their tokens paid for by the Anchorage School District's Child in Transition/Homeless Project. The program, run by the district's Title I program and housed at North Star, serves about 1,000 children each year in schools throughout the district. It helps to coordinate services provided by community agencies, the district, and schools, including transportation, counseling, purchasing of school supplies, tutoring, family activities, and parenting classes.

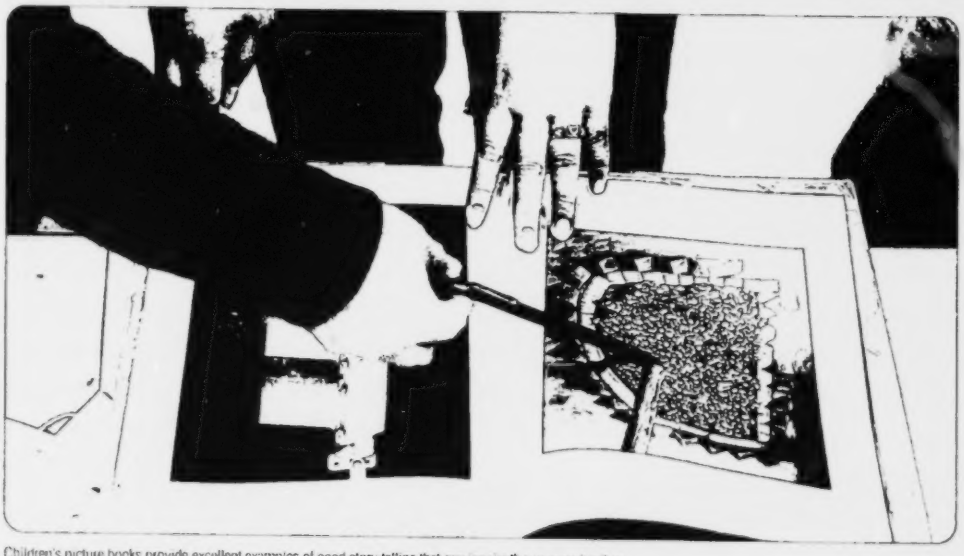
In a recent count, the district had more than 1,500 homeless students. Obviously, it's a big problem in this far north city, says Anchorage School Board member Harriet Drummond. Her sons were students at North Star Elementary in the mid-1990s, when homelessness and other family misfortunes contributed to a student mobility rate topping 90 percent. She recalls her youngest son having a hard time making friends because he didn't know who would be there from day to day. Homelessness, like the language gap, contributes to students' sense of isolation. As PTA president, Drummond saw firsthand the determination of the then-new principal, Myrna Moulton, to slow the turnover by caring for the needs of her students at every front.

"Myrna has made it a warm and welcoming place," she says, "and they have a wonderful number of innovative programs" that are helping to improve student achievement and lower mobility, now at about 60 percent. The school was honored for its successes by the U.S. Department of Education in 2000, when it chose North Star as a Distinguished Title I School. "Even if parents have to move out of the school's attendance area, she makes it possible for them to keep their kids at North Star," says Drummond.

Drummond lives a few blocks from North Star in a well-to-do enclave of Spenard, one of Anchorage's oldest—and, some say, notorious—sections of town. Neighborhood bars like the popular "sourdough" saloon, Chilkoot's, and the more hip Fly By Night, a hot spot for jazz and poetry slams, like to tout Spenard's old reputation as a red-light district. But today, the area is a richer mix of corporate and mom-and-pop

commerce, high- and low-income housing developments, littered alleys, and pristine parks.

The students at North Star, naturally, are just as diverse. While many struggle with literacy—either because English isn't their native language or they come from poor, "print-deprived" homes—others come to school with good reading and writing skills. Closing this literacy divide in the classroom is something Principal Myrna Moulton and her staff members have made a priority.



Children's picture books provide excellent examples of good story telling that can inspire the youngest writers.

NO MORE REVOLVING DOORS

The first thing they recognized was that pull-out programs weren't working. So many children needed bilingual and special education that classrooms had "revolving doors," with children coming and going all day long to attend support classes down the hall. So they scrapped the pull-out programs. Instead, Title I, special education, and bilingual teachers all began supporting students' learning in their homerooms, collaborating with the regular classroom teacher—every day.

"We just have a huge need here and providing services directly in the classroom, rather than pulling out a bunch of kids from the classroom several times a day, meets their needs better," says Amy Lyman, a Title I teacher.

There's one important exception: the language center. About 40 students of all grade levels who need intensive bilingual education because they have scant, if any, English skills, spend mornings from nine to noon together in the language center. They learn English largely through writing and reading. Afternoons, they rejoin their classmates in their homerooms. The language center allows Quintero, who designed the program, and four bilingual aides to prepare monolingual students to go beyond mere survival English and begin mastering "academic" language.

"Students are able to learn what we call 'social' English quite fast" because it's highly contextual, says Quintero, but academic language is about abstract ideas that require more complex language skills. Mastering these skills can take five to eight years, he says. But by teaching English through writing and reading, rather than solely through vocabulary drills and rote exercises—traditional methods of bilingual ed—Quintero and his colleagues are trying to shorten that period of time.

"At the same time that they're learning how to speak English, they're learning how to read and write in English, so it has an immediate value in their regular classrooms," he says.

Bilingual students who are more proficient in English spend the whole day in their homerooms, receiving individualized support in the classroom from bilingual aides. Afternoons, students of all language abilities are together in their homerooms.

WORKING TOWARD GOALS

Moulton brings a lot of resources to bear on supporting students' language acquisition. By coordinating some special programs, she and her staff have been able to create block time in reading and language arts, as well as mathematics. They're continuing a successful reading incentive program involving parent volunteers, as well as First Steps Reading, a model linking classroom instruction with child development. Rotary Readers, volunteers from the Anchorage International Rotary, tutor students in reading and sponsor activities and book purchases. Moulton and her staff carve out precious hours for professional development from staff meeting times, inservice days, and support classes, using the time to hone their instructional strategies in reading and writing.

The school is in a five-year partnership with NWREL, which is helping it to devise efficient ways to work collaboratively toward school priorities. All teachers now serve on committees that help the school meet its goals in writing, reading, math, technology, safety, morale building, grant writing, science and social studies, student discipline, and fine arts. Authors Night is one popular activity organized by the writing committee, providing a forum in which students read from their own stories to an audience of parents and families.

All of these efforts have helped boost student learning, Moulton says. Though high student mobility makes it very difficult for the school to show consistent gains in student achievement scores,

Teachers at North Star Elementary gather on an early fall morning to hone their skills in using the NWREL 6+1 Trait™ Writing instruction and assessment model in their classrooms.

tests show that students who stay at the school for a full year before a test are scoring increasingly higher in reading, language arts, and mathematics.

RECOGNIZING GOOD WRITING

It's August, just days before school starts, and Quintero and a group of fellow North Star teachers are gathered this morning in the language center for a day of staff training. It's a bit too warm in the room, and everyone would rather, truthfully, be back in his classroom arranging learning centers and going over lesson plans.

But Ruth Culham, one of the developers of the 6+1 Trait™ Writing instruction and assessment model and a NWREL trainer, is a rousing speaker. In short order, all eyes are trained on her and the colorful picture books she holds up, examples of good storytelling that are bound to inspire young writers. Soon, she has them up on their feet performing characters from Margie Palatini and Richard Egielski's picture book, *The Web Files*, and, later, furiously penning poems about the traits of good writing.

The traits, Culham says in the introduction to her book *6+1 Traits of Writing*, recently released by Scholastic, are characteristics that make a piece of writing work. The traits and scoring rubrics in the 6+1 Trait™ Writing model provide "a vocabulary teachers use to describe their vision of what good writing looks like—any kind of writing," whether it's a story, essay, or persuasive article, she says.

Just now, a group has come out of a huddle to read from a poem the teachers have written describing the importance of "voice"—the hardest trait to teach, some say:

The important thing about voice
Is that it is YOU, your sparkle,
Your personal passions and emotions.
It's tantalizing and unique; YOUR
Heart and soul revealed to the world.

Voice is when the writer seems to speak directly to the reader in a way that is individual and compelling. But, like unheard cries from a deep well, the "voices" of children who aren't native English speakers are often trapped inside themselves. So, how do you help these students to use their emerging English skills to express their own ideas and experiences—in ways that reveal their "hearts and souls"?

"Many of these kids don't live in a print-rich world, but they haven't been living in a vacuum," says Culham. "They have observations of life. They have their life stories. What is it they already know? They may not have English language, but they know a lot of stuff." You can help children's language development by talking with them, reading with them, and asking them lots of questions about their lives, she says.

Culham frequently looks to the writings of Donald Graves, author of *Writing Teachers and Children at Work* (Heinemann, 1982), for ways to help children come up with ideas to write about. She likes to share this quote from Graves's book with the teachers in her workshops:

> *Children who are fed topics, story starters, lead sentences, even opening paragraphs as a steady diet for three or four years, rightfully panic when topics have to come from them. The anxiety is not unlike that of the child whose mother has just turned off the television set. "Now what do I do?" bellows the child.*

To prompt students to draw on their own experiences, Culham cites Graves's suggestion to observe a child during his or her day and ask her questions: "Why did you . . .?" "How did you . . .?" "I notice that you . . ." and "What will you do when . . .?"

Such questions not only call on a

SHINING BRIGHT

STORY AND PHOTO BY DENISE JARRETT WEEKS

Ruth Culham could use a poem now, a few lines from her Uncle Don—Don Emblen, poet laureate for Sonoma County, California, and a retired professor at Santa Rosa Junior College. Now and again, he sends poems to his niece and other family members, always just at the right time, with just the right perception and encouragement.

"He writes these beautiful poems and gives them to his family, at different times in our lives," says Culham. This particular time in Culham's life is moving swiftly between great satisfactions and high anxieties. She's just moved into a new home and is still unpacking; she's booked around the country to train teachers in the 6+1 Trait™ Writing model; and her book, *6+1 Traits of Writing: The Complete Guide*, has just been released by Scholastic, Inc. It's Culham's first book, and she can't help but wonder what readers will think of it. Will teachers find it helpful? Will reviewers think it adds something of value to the professional literature?

Last week, Scholastic flew her to Las Vegas for the official release of her book and to demonstrate for a gathering of book buyers the six-trait approach to teaching and assessing writing. She and the book were a hit, but the fan whose opinion she most cared about was Sam, her 26-year-old son who'd come along for the big event.

"At first I thought, great! Sam will come with me and we'll spend some time together, but then when it came time for my workshop, I got stage fright having him there. It was scary!" she says with a laugh. "But, he said the sweetest thing: 'Mom, you were so good!'"

Culham's success in teaching others how to use the trait-based approach to helping students learn to write well has not only made her a trainer in demand, it's helped make the videos, books, rubrics, posters, and other 6+1 Trait™ Writing paraphernalia developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory hot commodities. The 6+1 Trait™ products have long been NWREL's number-one sellers (available from the *NWREL Products Catalog Online* at www.nwrel.org/catalog/). They've also become some of the most popular items sold by Carson-Dellosa Publishing Company, Inc. (www.carsondellosa.com), an educational publisher that contracts with NWREL to produce 6+1 Trait™ posters, organizers, sticky notes, and other classroom materials and sell them through local dealers all over the country.

Culham's book is the first time the Laboratory's model has been distilled into a guide to help teachers implement the approach in their own classrooms. The best way to learn to use the model, says Culham, is during workshops with certified trainers. But Culham, her colleague Janice Wright, and the dozen or so trainers they have working for them in various regions can't be everywhere at once. So, the guide is meant to give teachers a good start in learning how to use the traits to teach and assess writing.

LOVE OF LANGUAGE

More than anything else, the book project has made Culham feel an even stronger tie with her poet uncle. "I see what an influence his love of language has had on me," she says. While her mom always was an avid reader and modeled the joys that could be had from literature, "the real love of language came from him." Not unlike the graduate who returns to visit his professor in Emblen's poem, "A Philosophy Major Comes Back To Wish Me a Happy New Year"—"Yet, returneth he / to find out whence he comes"—Culham returns to his chapbooks now and again with renewed appreciation.

During childhood, Culham's family moved a lot, from one town to another in California and Arizona. By the time she was to start high school, her mom put her foot down. They were staying put in Pasadena. Her dad, a watchmaker, could not still his "wanderlust" and so kept moving. With hindsight, Culham credits her mom for getting her into the best high school she could, by renting a house in affluent South Pasadena where she believes she received a "world class education."

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child's language skills, but they let the child know that it matters what she thinks. That validation can be powerfully motivating to a student who's grappling to master a new language and fit into a new culture. Teachers can also help her bridge her home life with school, says Culham, by asking such things as, "What are your jobs at home?" and "What's the first thing you do when you get home?"

"These are all very tangible ideas about their lives" that they can draw on as they develop English language skills. As teachers, says Culham, "we've got to get inside these kids' experiences."

OUT OF THIS WORLD

What did you do on your summer vacation? It's a timeless back-to-school writing prompt that brings forth pencil-smudged papers on visits to Disneyland and camping trips. But what do you write about if you've never been on a family vacation? Or if you've barely been to school? How do you write about your life when it seems to differ in every way from the stories your classmates are telling?

Teacher Peggy Brannon had to ask herself these questions the first fall she taught at North Star Elementary. The writing exercise was a perennial hit at her previous school in relatively affluent South Anchorage, but her fourth-graders at North Star looked at her as if she had two heads.

"It went over like a lead balloon," Brannon recalls. "Most of the kids had never been out of Anchorage," much less on a grand vacation. The majority of her students were learning English for the first time, 13 had learning disabilities, and some were living in homeless shelters.

Sometimes, simply creating an experience in the classroom becomes grist for storytelling. Last year, Brannon piqued her students' storytelling instincts by delighting them with theatrics. She came to class one morning as "Lucy Mae," costumed as a Southern belle with a hat, smile, and drawl wide enough for the Kentucky Derby.

"One of the writing lessons is on providing details, so I asked them to describe Lucy Mae. I told them, don't just say she wore a hat. Describe what *kind* of hat, with what kind of flower and feathers. Some created a whole world for her. Their writing became very descriptive, even if they only wrote a few lines."

Lucy Mae's slow stroll into the classroom "was a very big deal to them," Brannon says with a laugh, and it inspired them to make some "spectacular" word choices. "One student wrote that Lucy Mae 'sauntered' into the room, so, sooner or later, everyone's characters were sauntering and sashaying into the room."

Reading and writing "takes them out of their world," she says, even when they're writing *about* that world. From an outside-looking-in vantage point, they can see the possibility of escape to a brighter future. Well, to a teacher, nothing tops that. It's what keeps Brannon coming back to these students, to throw them a lifeline out of the deep well of isolation.

"The six-traits writing just did it for me. It makes it so easy to explain to students what good writing looks like," says Brannon. Having yet to teach the same grade level twice, Brannon has found it invaluable that, at every grade level, North Star students learn about the six traits of writing. Students become savvy users of the traits, she says, able to tell anyone, for example, that sentence fluency is when "words flow on the page" or that focused ideas will grip the reader's attention.

Sometimes, she writes along with her students to a writing prompt, intentionally crafting a boring opening or making a couple of common writing errors. "That helps more than anything to say, 'Here's my story. What do you think?'" she says.

Last year, Brannon co-taught a blended fourth- and fifth-grade class with another teacher. They each would write along to prompts, beautifully illustrating how two very different pieces of writing can both be successful. "Our writing was completely different, and the kids could see our different styles and see, 'Oh, I don't have to write like everyone else.'"

Using money from a grant, North Star has bought scores of children's books that exemplify the traits of good writing. Brannon and several other teachers kept track of the books they selected for each lesson in a particular trait, and placed their lesson plans and matching book titles together in folders in one of the library's filing cabinets for others to use. She dipped liberally into that treasure trove herself.

"Every single one of those lessons has worked like a charm," she says.

The school also bought a number of books from a series that connects math and literature. The series groups literature books by math concept and grade level and, as teachers use the books in their classrooms, they file their lesson plans in the library for others to use, too.

In fact, Moulton and her staff feel the time is right to shift their schoolwide focus to math, particularly teaching kids how to bring their writing skills to math problem solving.

"It's crucial to make connections between math and writing" in the classroom, says Amy Lyman, because in problem solving, "you don't just write down the answer as '11,' you explain *why* your answer is '11.'"

THE GREATEST GIFT

For children whose lives have been disconnected in one way or another, writing can be a through-line that connects their inner and public lives, their understanding of the world with new knowledge, their individualism with identity. So when Ruth Culham asks the teachers in her workshop on that fall day in Anchorage, "Literacy, is there a greater gift you can give someone?", the question rings true.

Enrique Quintero hadn't planned to be a teacher. Rather, he'd prepared to be a sociologist with hopes of changing the world. But here, giving the gift of literacy, he may be making the biggest difference of all. "It is an honorable profession. It is a profession that denies you certain kinds of satisfactions, but gives you other ones," he says. "I feel good about what I do." □

BRIGHT

Continued from Page 12

She went on to earn, first, a degree in education, then a master's in English, from University of Montana in Missoula and a doctorate in education from the American University of Asturias in Spain. Her graduate adviser, Beverly Ann Chin, a past president of the National Council for Teachers of English, is still a close friend and wrote the foreword to her book.

For the next 15 years, Culham —being chosen Montana's English Teacher of the Year—taught middle school in Missoula, and got married and had a baby. When her husband was offered a job in Portland, Oregon, she accepted a position with the Beaverton School District, teaching high school English. She was in mid-career, at a time when burnout can easily set in, but she was coteaching with a beginning teacher who kept her "energized" and open to new ideas. Now, this is what she tries to do for other teachers at her workshops.

"When you start teaching, there's a kind of missionary zeal that you have, you believe that you have something to offer the next generation, and that sustains you for a while," she says, "but for so many teachers, by mid-career, they've gotten dragged down by politics, by demands of their district.

"To be really good, they have to rediscover their talents and their zeal for teaching. And that's what I try to lead them back to, by creating opportunities for them to rediscover themselves as teachers."

Culham says she gives them "permission" to let go of some of the old chestnuts of teaching language arts, such as relying overly on spelling tests, memorizing vocabulary lists, and penmanship. Instead, she urges them to connect language learning with other aspects of the school day by integrating reading and writing with other subjects, and encouraging dialogue by asking children open-ended questions about their ideas and reasoning.

When assessing students' writing, she advises, assess one trait at a time, respecting students' drafts by not marking every single error. "Squeeze it once, and let it go," she says, passing on a favorite phrase of the author Ralph Fletcher. There's ample opportunity, through the revision process or in another writing assignment altogether, to address other things that need attention.

"As a trainer, you've got to validate teachers' good work, but also give them something they can use to move on to another level," says Culham. "I try to find a way to help them tap into that energy they had when they started teaching. They didn't go into teaching for the money or the summer vacation; they went into it because they wanted to help kids."

Culham came to the Laboratory in 1991, joining a team of people who'd begun to develop, with the help of classroom teachers in Montana and Oregon, a model for teaching and assessing writing.

"When I came to the Laboratory, there was all of this positive work going on by Rick Stiggins, Judy Arter, and Vicki Spandel. I came in as someone with the most classroom experience among us. So I started working on what I knew best, developing classroom lessons" that focused on each key trait of good writing: ideas, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, voice, and presentation. "It was like going to school, working with them. I learned so much."

Stiggins went on to found the Assessment Training Institute in Portland, and Arter joined him there. Spandel now works for Houghton Mifflin's Great Source Education Group. Under Culham's care over the past 11 years, the Laboratory's 6+1 Trait™ Writing model has been developed into a leading professional development and assessment model that is used across the United States and abroad, and is the basis for some state writing assessment tools.

"I feel like I've done a lot in 11 years," she says. What will the next decade of work look like for her? Scholastic already wants her to write another book, a 6+1 Trait™ Writing guide for primary teachers. There's a NWREL study underway of schools that have been using the model successfully. Culham would like to help determine what strategies they're using to make the model so effective in their schools. And it's time to update *Picture Books*, an annotated bibliography of picture books categorized by the traits they exemplify.

But there are two others things Culham's always wanted to do: write a children's chapter book, and start a school that could be a demonstration site for best practices. Perhaps another well-timed poem will give her just the lift she needs to make these wishes come true, too.

"The stars are shining bright," she says with a smile.

To order *6+1 Traits of Writing: The Complete Guide*, contact Scholastic, Inc. at 1-800-SCHOLASTIC.

PRODUCTS TO GUIDE THE WRITING PROCESS

FROM BOOKS TO VIDEOS TO VISUAL AIDS, A GROWING COLLECTION OF MATERIALS SUPPORTS THE 6+1 TRAIT™ MODEL.

By CATHERINE PAGLIN

The 6+1 Trait™ Writing Assessment and Instruction Model has spawned a small industry at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. While the inhouse writing-trait gurus haven't added a night shift, they do stay busy conceiving and crafting the 6+1™ Trait resources teachers need and demand: everything from customized sticky notes to training videos to an assessment model for Spanish writing. More than 40 such items are now available.

The latest product out the door is Ruth Culham's *6+1 Traits of Writing: The Complete Guide*, published by Scholastic, which bills it as "everything you need to teach and assess student writing with this powerful model." *The Complete Guide* includes writing samples, scoring rubrics, student guides, and hundreds of lessons and activities for grades three through 12.

"Scholastic wanted this book because publishers see how widespread the use of the traits is, from classrooms in every state, to the influence of the traits on state assessment," says Culham, unit manager for NWREL's Assessment Program.

Filled with real-life examples and anecdotes, *The Complete Guide* is written in a personable, lively style reflecting Culham's infectious enthusiasm about good writing. An easy-to-read, practical format and children's drawings about the traits complement the accessible prose.

Before diving into the traits in detail, Culham relates how they grew out of teachers' need to define the elements of good writing. Through comparing and discussing countless student papers, these teachers arrived at the six traits, which have been gradually refined over the years. Culham also reviews research studies which show that writing improves —at the classroom, school, and district levels —when students learn how to assess their own writing using the traits.

The guide's second chapter explores the link between the traits and the writing process—prewriting, drafting, sharing, revising, editing, and publishing. Subsequent chapters focus on each of the traits: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation. Each chapter defines a trait, reviews problems and highlights of the trait, provides assessment practice, and explores why each sample paper is scored as it is.

For each trait, the book provides numerous teaching activities as well as suggestions for adapting the activities to different grade levels. If, for instance, a teacher finds her students need to work on the trait of "organization," she'll find help in lessons on writing leads, making smooth transitions, sequencing main points logically, pacing the presentation, and closing with a satisfying conclusion.

Scheduled for release in December 2002, the 304-page paperback is part of Scholastic's Theory and Practice line of books, devoted to current trends in education. Culham anticipates it will be used for staff development sessions, by practicing teachers, and in college classes. She has agreed to write another book for Scholastic using the same format and focusing on the primary grades.

TEACHING THE TRAITS

Teachers of young writers, however, need not put the traits on hold until such time as Culham puts pen to paper again. *Seeing With New Eyes: A Guidebook on Teaching and Assessing Beginning Writers* brims over with tips for using the traits in the primary classroom.

New Eyes traces the development of children's writing, beginning with scribbles and dictation, through experimentation with letters, to multiple sentences and an expanding vocabulary. We see that the writing traits manifest themselves in students' earliest writing efforts, and even in pictures. Are students putting a title at the top of the page or filling a page with text or pictures in a visually balanced way? Those are signs of a sense of organization. Do students know that English and Spanish prose usually moves from left to right and that people usually read from the top to the bottom of the page? Does a student enthusiastically place a period after almost every *word* in his writing? Such knowledge and practices show an awareness of conventions.

New Eyes discusses how the writing process works at the primary level, how to teach the traits to beginning writers, and how to use reading to teach writing. An entire chapter is devoted to answering teachers' frequently asked questions such as, "Do students need to write every day?" and, "How do I know when students are successful?" A companion video of the same name shows young students at work in classrooms where teachers use the techniques presented in the book.

For older as well as younger students, using picture books in the classroom can bring the writing traits to life. That's the premise of *Picture Books: An Annotated Bibliography With Activities for Teaching Writing* by Ruth Culham. The bibliography describes more than 200 first-rate children's books, grouping them by the trait they illuminate best. For example, for illustrations of strong sentence fluency, teachers might turn to *The Table Where Rich People Sit* by Byrd Baylor, *Slugs* by David Greenberg, *The Great Migration* by Jacob Lawrence, or *River Dream* by Allan Say.

Following the bibliography, more than 50 teacher-written lessons and activities, also grouped by trait, suggest ways to integrate the traits and the books into writing instruction at all grade levels. A related NWREL product—the training video *Picture This: Using Picture Books in Middle and High School To Teach Writing*—goes inside real classrooms to observe teachers using picture books as models to help students with ideas, organization, and other facets of writing.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE TRAITS

Spanish-speaking English language learners are a significant and growing population in U.S. schools. What is a fair and reliable method for assessing these students—one that promotes as well as measures learning? The authors of *The Traits of Effective Spanish Writing* believe the answer lies in assessments that parallel those in English, but are developed in the native language.

The Traits of Effective Spanish Writing brings "las caracteristicas" to the bilingual classroom. Not a mere translation of the English version, the Spanish traits grew out of real bilingual classrooms, authentic student writing samples, and research on how students learn to read and write Spanish. While the traits are similar in Spanish and English, the Spanish version reflects characteristics particular to Spanish. For instance, Spanish writing may have a greater number of long sentences than English; organization of Spanish writing may not be as linear as that of English writing; and Spanish spelling, grammar, and punctuation conventions are very different from those of English, potentially causing difficulty for bilingual students. This guidebook contains scoring rubrics, sample papers, and the 6+1 Spanish traits—*tema e ideas, organización, tono y estilo, uso del lenguaje, fluidez, gramática y ortografía,* and *presentación.*

Like its English counterpart, *Spanish Picture Books* identifies high-quality children's literature to enrich the teaching of writing. An annotated bibliography lists by trait more than 50 books either written in or translated into Spanish. Books like *Pelitos* by Sandra Cisneros and *El Viejo y Su Puerta* by Gary Soto illustrate strong word choice or *uso del lenguaje. La Tortilleria* by Gary Paulsen and *La Lagartija y el Sol* provide examples of the trait of *organización.* English books that celebrate Spanish language and Latino culture also are included. Thirty sample lesson plans written in Spanish present ideas on how to use the books for teaching particular traits.

SPREADING THE WORD

NWREL staff members haven't had to go door-to-door to convince teachers to try the 6+1 Trait™ Model. Instead, every week they field hundreds of e-mails and phone calls concerning the traits. The Laboratory disseminates the model to teachers, administrators, and staff development experts through school workshops and training institutes held around the country. Workshop topics include 6+1 Trait™ writing assessment, integrating writing assessment and instruction, using the traits with beginning writers, tips for administrators, and using the Spanish writing traits for instruction and assessment. Advanced institutes and workshops train experienced users of the model to spread the word back at their own school or district.

For those who can't attend a NWREL training event, a video series, produced by NWREL and distributed by Carson-Dellosa Publishing, may be the next best thing. The eight videotapes and associated materials in *6+1 Trait Writing: A Model That Works* help maintain consistency and quality in the 6+1 Trait™ training process and content. Each eight-minute video (one on each trait, plus an introduction) features a definition of the trait, a student skit, teacher interviews, and sample assessments. The facilitator's guide gives tips for using the videos and sample overheads to best advantage.

When a school begins using the 6+1™ Trait Model of Assessment and Instruction, parents shouldn't be left out of the loop. Unfortunately, with the intent of helping, parents sometimes feel compelled to point out all the errors and defects they see in a child's work. What is the result? Frequently it's not an improved piece of writing, but a sulky, angry, even tearful child. *Dear Parent: A Handbook for Parents of 6-Trait Writing Students* suggests ways parents can respond positively and constructively to a child's efforts, as well as encourage more reading and writing. Just phrasing suggestions differently may make a big difference in how a child reacts, the booklet points out.

Dear Parent also explains the traits, the scoring rubric, and the revision process. It answers frequently asked questions such as, "What about invented spelling?" and, "Is a 5 the same as an A?" and, "If my child writes on a word processor, what differences will this make?" A *Dear Parent* companion videotape features teachers, parents, and students discussing the 6+1 Trait™ model.

6+1 TRAIT™ SPIN-OFFS

Like a popular movie or television show, the 6+1 Trait™ Writing Model has inspired a raft of what one distributor dubs "coordinating products." No, students will not, any time soon, be dressing as Conventions or Sentence Fluency at Halloween, or toting their sandwiches in 6+1 Trait™ lunch boxes. Teachers can now buy numerous items to enhance their use of the 6+1 Trait™ Model.

Charts and bulletin board sets focus on the traits and the writing process. The "Wonderful Writers" bulletin board set, for example, gives teachers an instructive way of displaying strong student writing. Writing trait icons such as

a light bulb labeled "Bright Ideas!", an eraser labeled "Correct Conventions," and a dictionary labeled "Wonderful Word Choice" call out the trait in which a particular student work excels.

Teachers can keep the model uppermost in their students' minds with the "Traits of Good Writing" bulletin board set. The set includes a checklist for each trait, blank charts for brainstorming, a 6+1 Trait poster, a large pencil character for drawing attention to student work, and a bulletin board header.

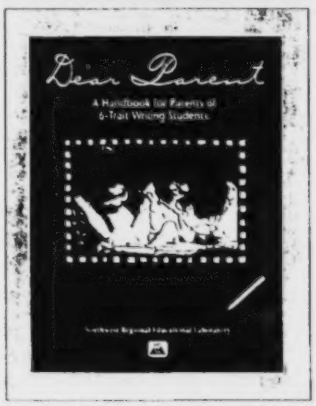
Sticky notes are a fixture on desktops everywhere. Now, they are even more indispensable to teachers with the availability of 6+1 Trait sticky notes in several handy forms: a revision checklist, an editing checklist, a scoring guide with room for comments, and a "Think About Your Writing" notepad with room for teacher comments or student self-evaluation.

NWREL produces several writing assessment posters for different audiences: one for the primary classroom, one for the upper elementary grades, one with the Spanish 6+1 Traits, and a seven-poster set for middle and high school classrooms.

The seven posters in the middle and high school set form the exclamation "Write!" when hung in sequence. In these posters, each trait—sound ideas, good organization, individual voice, powerful words, smooth fluency, and correct conventions—expresses its characteristics through both words and graphic design. The words in the poster for "smooth fluency," for example, form a graceful spiral: "My sentences begin in different ways. Some sentences are short and some are long. It just sounds good as I read it aloud—it flows. My sentences have power and punch. I have 'sentence sense.'"

What new classroom aids, instructional materials, books, videotapes, and publishing partnerships lie in the future? One thing is certain. Whatever they are and however popular they prove to be, their *raison d'être* is not someone's desire to sell a million widgets, but the needs and requests of teachers and students. "Teachers and kids first—products second," says Culham.

For ordering information, see the NWREL Products Catalog Online, www.nwrel.org/comm/catalog/, or call 1-800-547-6339, ext. 519. □



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Spring issue
Back From the Brink: Saving Kids With Learning Disabilities From Failure

Summer issue
Discovery Learning: Lessons From Lewis and Clark

Fall issue
Information Central: The School Librarian in the 21st Century

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identify places where good things are happening,
provide descriptions of effective techniques being used,
suggest useful resources, and submit letters to the editor.

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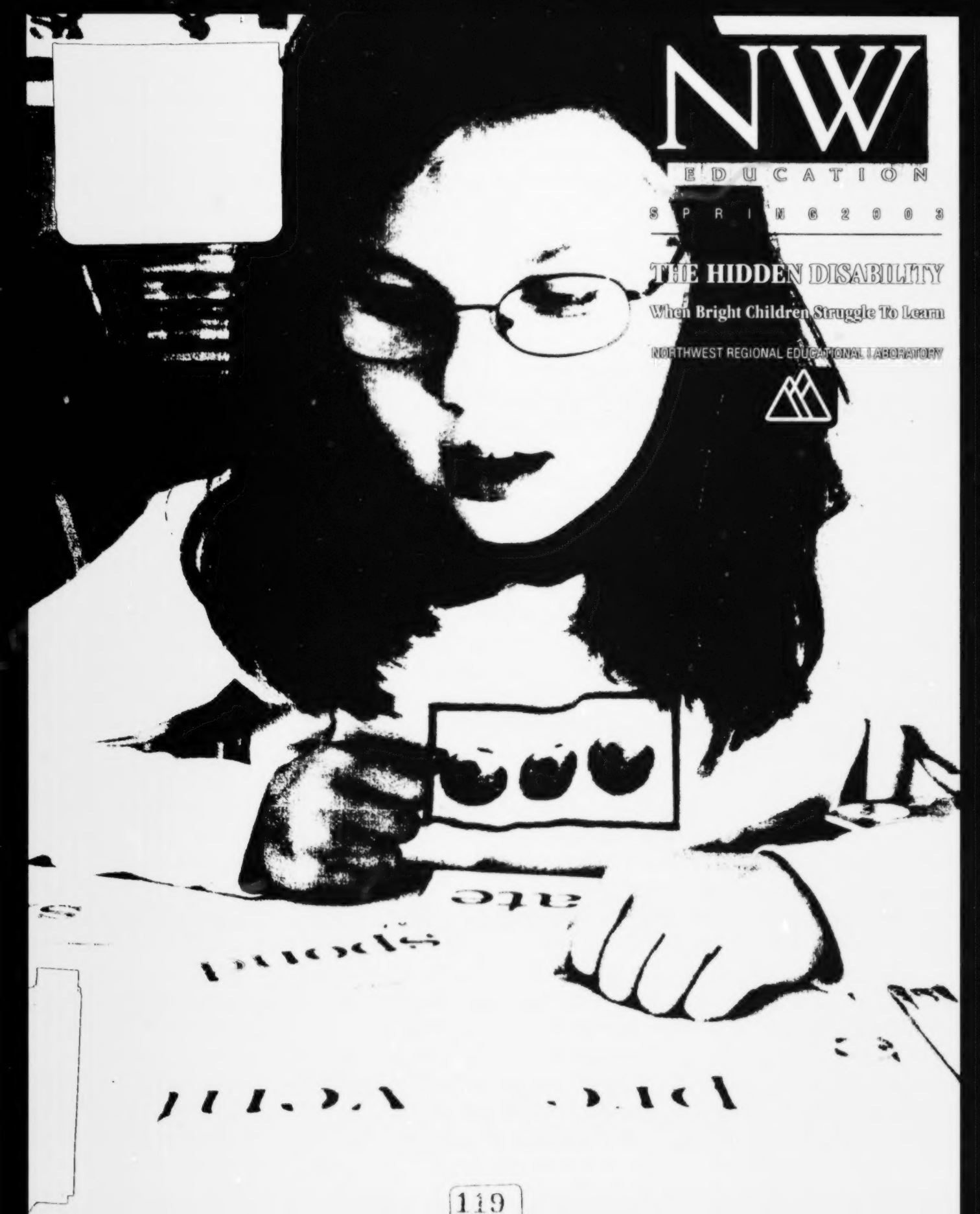

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THE HIDDEN DISABILITY

When Bright Children Struggle To Learn

NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

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VOLUME 8 NUMBER 3
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The Hidden Disability

When Bright Children Struggle To Learn

ON THE COVER:
Alexandra "Ali" Johnston, a fifth-grader at Portland's Alameda Elementary School, works on language skills weekly with her tutor, Kay Kaplan of Language Skills Therapy (see the story about Kaplan on Page 22). The daughter of Ronda Williamson and David Johnston of Northeast Portland, Ali brings her beautiful singing voice and emerging acting skills to performances with the Northwest Children's Theater and other local dramatic groups.
PHOTOGRAPH BY JUDY BLANKENSHIP

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An overview of the latest research on learning disabilities sheds new light on the neurological clues that help explain dyslexia and other learning problems, and suggests promising strategies for parents and teachers.

9 **Meeting the Challenge**
A collection of profiles on individuals immersed in the field of learning disabilities reveals the human side of this complex—and often-painful—educational Mt. Everest.

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- ☐ **Seeing Yourself Sitting There**
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DEPARTMENT
36 Principal's Notebook

I felt guilty making Michael go off to school every morning. He would cry and dawdle and complain about an aching head or an upset stomach. He looked so miserable as he slouched off to the bus stop wearing a backpack bulging with books that he was unable to read, despite being a fifth-grader. I had a lump in my throat as I called out hopefully, "Have a good day!"

Then came the day he exploded. For weeks, kids at his new school in Northeast Portland had shunned him in the lunchroom and called him a "dummy" because he had never learned to decipher written language. Finally, his rage and shame spewed out in a spasm of violence. He punched another kid in the hallway. When the principal asked Mike to write down his version of what happened, his explanation looked something like this: *"gdncldmedmndihthm."*

At home that night, Mike sat on his dad's lap and cried bitterly, sobbing as though his heart was broken. "I *hate* my life, I *hate* my life," he moaned, tears streaking his pale cheeks. "Dad, get a gun and shoot me. Just shoot me."

It's five years later now, but this scene—a sturdy 10-year-old boy folded limply in his daddy's arms, wailing in despair—is clearer in my mind than this morning's traffic jam.

In hindsight, it seems obvious that Mike was struggling with a problem much deeper than simply lagging behind. But in the beginning, Mike's dad (then a single parent trying to hold things together alone) accepted the first- and second-grade teachers' assurances that Mike would "catch up." When Mike wasn't reading by third grade, the school assigned him to the resource teacher for a half-hour of remediation each day. Pretty soon, Dad was running Mike to additional remedial classes evenings and summers. When I started dating Mike's dad, I'd drive up to their house on school nights and spot the two of them through the kitchen window, heads together at the old Formica table, Mike's forehead scrunched in concentration over a schoolbook.

Still, he couldn't read.

After Mike's blow-up at school, we kept him home and insisted that the district find an appropriate placement for him. Testing revealed a huge discrepancy between his IQ level (normal) and his achievement level (somewhere between first and second grade). He showed classic signs of dyslexia, such as failing to link letters with sounds. Finally, we had a diagnosis: Mike had a learning disability. Serendipitously, the school district had just that year launched its Intensive Learning Center program, geared for kids like Mike—bright children whose brain wiring doesn't respond well to traditional teaching methods.

As I drove Mike across town to his first day at his new school, he looked out the window while our minivan cruised across the Marquam Bridge, Portland glowing in the morning sun. "I'm going to go to Harvard," he said.

"Great!" I said.

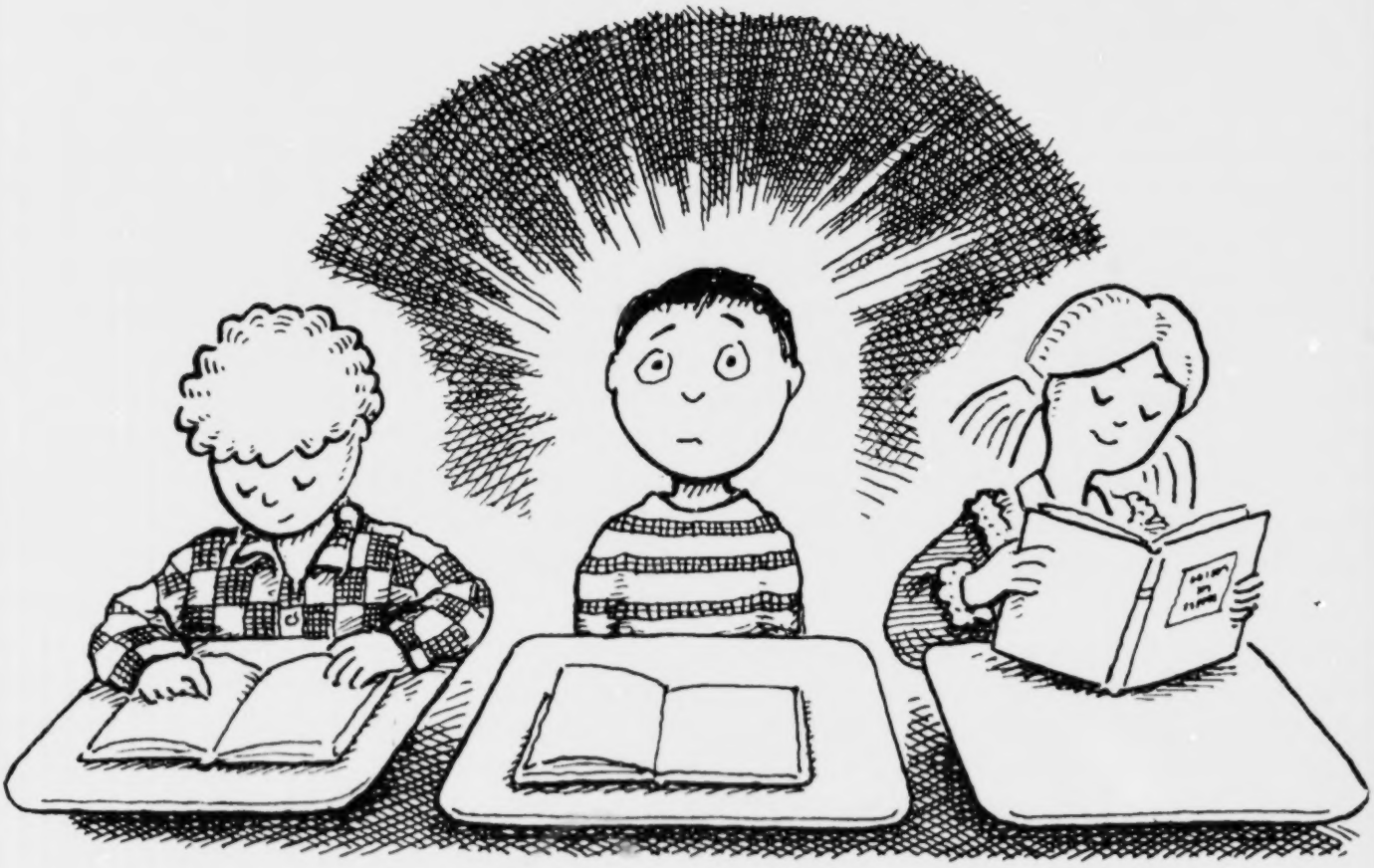
"*And* Stanford," he added.

I smiled. A few minutes later, he said, "I'm going to be a doctor. *And* a lawyer." This was the kid who only a few weeks before had complained, scowling, about facing a certain future as a garbage collector.

Mike stayed in the ILC through seventh grade. In those three years, he soared from zero reading skills to advanced reading skills. He's a sophomore, now. School is still a struggle. But just this week he landed a job tutoring a couple of neighbor kids whose grades are suffering after their parents' divorce.

When I dropped Mike off at school this morning, it was he who called out cheerfully, "Have a good day!" His chin was up, his shoulders were straight. He can read the books stuffed in his backpack. The appropriate placement—one that employed teaching methods proven to work with LD kids—not only made a difference for Mike. We believe it saved his life.

—Lee Sherman
shermanl@nwrel.org



"WHY CAN'T I READ?"

CURRENT RESEARCH OFFERS NEW HOPE TO DISABLED LEARNERS

"Little kids are tender individuals,
easily frustrated and ashamed
of deficient reading skills
once they notice that many of their classmates
read so effortlessly."

—RESEARCHER G. REID LYON,
THE WASHINGTON POST, 1996

BY LEE SHERMAN
ILLUSTRATION BY KENNY HIGDON

The new teacher was alarmed to discover that so many of his third-graders were hapless readers—seemingly stymied by the written word. But he was certain that wonderful stories, engagingly told, could unlock the mysteries of print for any child. So he lavished upon his students the riches of literature, steeped them in the magic of good books. When June rolled around, however, he was deeply dismayed to find that the very same children who could barely read in September—fully one-third of the class—were no less lost as they headed home for summer break.

"Their reading remained slow and effortful, the time it took to read text was so great that they could not remember what they read, and their spelling was still lousy," the teacher recalled several decades later. "The only change I could discern was that their motivation to learn had waned, and their self-esteem had suffered substantially."

The teacher felt he had failed his young charges. He abandoned the classroom—but not the profession. Today, he is a leading voice for science-based interventions for struggling readers.

G. Reid Lyon of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) told the story above to Congress in 2000 as he made a case for more and better research on how kids learn to read and why so many bright children can't crack the code. The big challenges, he says, are twofold: one, to unravel the secrets of learning disabilities that keep kids shut out of literacy. And two, to overcome those disabilities with proven interventions. In a world driven by the written word, the damage done by untreated reading problems can be devastating—to kids, to families, to society.

"Reading disability is not only an educational problem," Lyon wrote in the *Washington Post* in 1996. "It is a major public health and economic concern."

A "COCKTAIL" OF DISABILITIES

In recent years, a lot of old theories about learning disabilities have been discredited. Among the ideas that science has trashed: That learning disabled (LD) kids see backwards or upside-down and hence are more likely to reverse letters and numbers (not so, researchers now say). That boys are more likely to be LD (girls just don't get identified as often because they tend to behave nicely). That learning disabilities stem from poor parenting or laziness (not a whiff of truth). That LD kids will "grow out of it" (in fact, learning disabilities are lifelong conditions).

Ever since learning disabilities were officially recognized by the federal government in the late 1960s, researchers have been chipping away at the myths. But suddenly, in the mid-1990s, a couple of scientific advances coincided to revolutionize the field. Powerful new technologies have let research teams at the University of Washington and Yale capture real-time images of the brain at work. And the monumental Human Genome Project, which mapped the infinitely complex genetic code, has helped unmask other clues for these and other NICHD-funded teams.

Learning disabilities, it turns out, stem from faulty wiring in the brain. LD kids—far from slacking off—are working mightily when they tackle even the simplest language tasks. In fact, in a 1999 test involving word pairs, they used nearly five times the brain area as other kids, the UW team found. The brain imaging tools reveal a clear "neural signature"—that is, a distinct pattern of brain activity for disabled readers. "If you have a broken arm, we can see that on an X-ray," Yale researcher Sally Shaywitz told *Education Week* in September 1999. "These brain-activated patterns now provide evidence for what has previously been a hidden disability."

The other big new finding: Learning disabilities have a genetic link. Just as kids can inherit olive skin, migraines, or musical talent from Grandma, so, too, can they inherit her learning disorder. Of the 20 genes associated with the reading process, UW researchers Jennifer Thomson and Wendy Raskind recently singled out several possible sites on five different chromosomes that have been implicated in reading and writing disorders.

These discoveries constitute a death blow to the widely held notion that learning disabilities don't really exist—that kids with normal intelligence who struggle to learn just aren't trying hard enough or aren't getting enough support from Mom and Dad. As knowledge about learning disabilities has grown, so have the numbers. Fewer than 800,000 kids were identified as LD in the mid-1970s. But by the middle of the 1990s, that figure had swelled to 2.5 million, according to the U.S. Department of Education. By the new millennium, LD kids accounted for half of all placements into special ed.

The ways kids can be disabled vary. In her classic book, *Learning Disabilities: Theories, Diagnosis, and Teaching Strategies*, Janet Lerner, a professor of education at Northeastern Illinois University, identifies several types of learning disabilities:

Dyslexia: Unusual difficulty sounding out letters and confusing words that sound similar; the most common form of disability

Dysgraphia: Difficulty expressing thoughts on paper and with the act of writing itself; characterized by problems gripping a pencil and unreadable penmanship

Dyscalculia: Incomprehension of simple mathematical functions; often, a child won't perceive shapes and will confuse arithmetic symbols

Lerner then goes on to describe several related problems that tend to turn up in the same kids:

Dyspraxia: Difficulty performing complex movements, including muscle motions needed for talking

Auditory discrimination: Trouble distinguishing similar sounds, or confusing the sequence of heard or spoken sounds

Attention deficit disorder: Extreme hyperactivity and distractibility; many children with learning disabilities suffer from ADD as well

Dysnomia: The inability to recall the names or words for common objects

Visual perception: The inability to differentiate between foreground and background, as well as similar-looking numbers, letters, shapes, objects, and symbols; problems may include habitually skipping over lines of text

Although learning disabilities have distinct names, they typically occur in clusters rather than in isolation. People who have trouble reading, for instance, very often have trouble writing, too. Other problems, such as attention deficit disorder, complicate the picture even further. For example, 30 percent of people with learning disabilities also struggle with ADD. "Disabilities don't fit into neat categories," Pat Wingert and Barbara Kantrowitz explain in a 1997 *Newsweek* piece. "They are more likely to be a cocktail of disability types and associated problems."

BRAIN WAVES

Of the various disorders, dyslexia is by far the most common (hence, the most widely studied and well understood). Estimates of dyslexia among students range from 5 to 20 percent, nationwide. Shaywitz, who conducted a long-term study of 450 Connecticut kids beginning in 1983, categorized 20 percent of the children as reading disabled. That's one in five kids, adding up to at least 10 million children across the U.S. The University of Washington, in a 2000 press release, puts the proportion of dyslexic kids at between 5 and 15 percent of all students.

Many researchers posit a continuum of disability. Where each child falls on that continuum depends on a unique blend of genes, environment, and what Thomson and Raskind call "stochastic processes"—what most of us term "chance events." Lyon contends that among the typical 20 percent of troubled readers (those who have "substantial difficulties" learning to read), only about half are truly dyslexic. And that's where a grey mist rolls in to cloud the landscape of diagnosis and treatment. With this "disability," hidden behind the façade of a smart child who is very often clever and creative, the designation of "LD" can be tough to make. And what about normal IQ kids who struggle to read, yet don't have that telltale "neural signature"? Sorting out the infinite gradations of learning difficulties can boggle the best of teachers.

> "Children humiliated by their inability to overcome their learning problems also tend to develop behavioral and emotional disorders. Kids with learning problems are twice as likely to drop out of school; a disturbingly high number end up with criminal records."
>
> —Pat Wingert and Barbara Kantrowitz, *Newsweek*, Oct. 27, 1997

> “Learning disabilities encompass a wide range of disorders in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and mathematics that are frequently accompanied by . . . deficits in attention and social behavior.”
>
> —G. Reid Lyon, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

Lyon and others argue that countless kids are being mistakenly labeled as disabled—that with the right instruction at the right time, these at-risk students would be spared the trauma of special ed placement and all the emotional baggage it carries. Unnecessary special services can be a costly drain in this era of budgets worn thin by tax revolts, slumping markets, and rising energy prices—an era when many schools are hard-pressed to fund separate programs for lagging learners. Timely teaching with scientifically supported strategies can negate the need for pricey intervention for all but the most disabled.

“Researchers suspect there’s a window between the ages of five and seven when the underlying skills of reading are most easily learned,” Kantrowitz and Anne Underwood wrote in a 1999 *Newsweek* article. They note that a kindergarten teacher can accomplish in 30 minutes what a fourth-grade teacher would need two hours to do. Extrapolate those figures to the sixth or seventh grades—the time when many LD kids finally start getting help—and you begin to get a sense of the costs of waiting. Notes Lyon: “Unless children are identified and provided with appropriate interventions by the second or third grade, their chances of ‘catching up’ in reading are reduced dramatically. This does not mean that we cannot succeed with older students. We can, but the cost in both time and money is essentially tripled.”

Read the research literature about what kind of intervention LD kids need, and you’ll find two words turning up again and again: “early” and “appropriate.” No one really argues about what “early” means. As noted above, the jury is in on third grade as the pivot point for long-term reading proficiency. But when you take up the topic of what’s “appropriate,” you’d better put on a heat shield. That’s because you’ve dropped a match into the most explosive cauldron of educational philosophy: whole language versus phonics. The decades-old debate about direct instruction versus discovery learning crystallizes clearly in the field of reading disabilities. Here’s why: A mounting body of evidence shows that struggling readers—both the truly disabled as well as the chronically confused—lack a skill that is absolutely essential to the reading process: phonemic awareness. Simply put, it’s the ability to hear the individual sounds in spoken words. The typical disabled reader can’t distinguish those sounds (called phonemes), so she fails to make the next leap—linking sounds to letters. Without these basic building blocks, the rest of the reading skills—decoding, word recognition, and reading comprehension—are all but impossible.

Researchers point to this deficit as the missing piece in the puzzle of dyslexia among children who have “average or above average intelligence, robust oral language experience, and frequent interactions with books,” to use the language of Lyon. He notes that many of the children studied under the NICHD-funded research have been read to regularly since infancy, have well-developed speaking vocabularies, and “can quickly understand and discuss in rich detail” the content of text read aloud to them. Yet they “flounder” when they try to read age-appropriate material on their own.

The nub of the problem lies in whether kids can grasp the “alphabetic principle” on which the English language rests. To read the language, Lyon explains in the *Washington Post*, one must “unlock the relationships” between 40 sounds and 26 letters. A decade of NICHD research has taught us, he says, that “in order for a beginning reader to learn how to map or translate printed symbols (letters and letter patterns) to sound, he or she must intuitively understand that speech can be segmented, and that segmented units of speech can be represented by printed forms”—an awareness that to most of us seems “so easy and commonplace that we take it for granted.” But recent findings in university laboratories have turned up a juicy tidbit: It is not the ear that helps children understand that a spoken word like “cat” is divided into three sounds and that these sounds can be mapped onto the letters */c/*, */a/*, and */t/*. Rather, it is the brain. “In many individuals,” Lyon says, “the brain is not processing this type of linguistic

phonological information in an efficient manner."

A study from Yale published in the July 15, 2002, issue of the journal *Biological Psychiatry* found that dyslexia is linked to a particular region of the brain, which shows disruptions in affected children. The researchers found that dyslexic children compensate by learning to read with other parts of their brains. "Dyslexic children can't use the highly specialized area (of the brain) that is activated in good readers and therefore don't read automatically or fluently," lead author Bennett Shaywitz told Hannah Gladfelter Rubin of *Education Daily* in July 2002. "Because they develop compensatory systems on the front and right side of the brain, they read more accurately over time, but remain slow readers."

Based on these and other findings—including the report of the National Reading Panel—Lyon and colleagues argue convincingly for early reading instruction that's rich in lessons about the sound–letter relationship.

"Disabled readers must be presented highly structured, explicit, and intensive instruction in phonics rules and the application of the rules to print," he says. "Longitudinal data indicate that systematic, structured phonics instruction results in more favorable outcomes in reading than does a context emphasis."

Contrary to the old-style "drill-and-kill" approach to phonics in which kids sat at their desks, dazed by mind-numbing flash cards and other rote exercises, instruction in the sound–letter link *can* be developmentally appropriate—even fun. Researcher Virginia Berninger, who directs the Multidisciplinary Learning Disabilities Center at the University of Washington, has developed a package of materials with The Psychological Corporation called PAL (Process Assessment of the Learner). Published in 1998 by Harcourt Brace & Company, the *PAL Guides for Intervention: Reading and Writing* offer a collection of research-based "sound games" and "looking games" for first- and second-graders that take only about 10 minutes and boost kids' word skills significantly.

Researchers are in agreement, though, that a curriculum that is all phonics and no context ("real reading in real books") is a loser. Just as the National Research Council stressed in its important 1998 report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, "balance" is the place to be. "A number of NICHD studies being conducted at different research sites have all reported that a balanced instructional program composed of direct instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, and contextual reading is necessary for gains in reading skills to be achieved," Lyon says. "Without a doubt, we have found that teaching methods that are based upon only one philosophy, such as 'the whole-language approach' or 'the phonics method,' are counterproductive for children with reading disabilities. No matter how bright the child and how interesting the reading material, a child will not learn to read unless he or she understands how print is translated into sound. Likewise, no matter how much phonological awareness and phonics knowledge a youngster has, the child will not want to engage in reading and writing unless it is meaningful and interesting and taught in an exciting and vibrant fashion."

> "There are chemical differences in brain function of dyslexic and nondyslexic children during sound-processing tasks."
>
> —University of Washington press release, May 24, 2000

DYSLEXIA AND THE THREE TIERS

On the green-treed UW campus under the grey skies of Seattle, Professor Berninger's team has come up with a promising plan to help schools teach all learners to read. Along with her UW colleague Scott Stage, as well as Donna Rury Smith and Denise Hildebrand of The Psychological Corporation, Berninger recommends a three-tier model designed to prevent, diagnose, and treat reading problems. The model, which translates the lofty findings of researchers into everyday classroom practice, seeks to cut off most reading problems at the pass—that is, stop them before they gather momentum. The idea is to blend scrutiny of students and instruction in a continuous tapestry—assess and intervene, assess and modify, assess and treat. This tightly woven fabric of assessment and instruction aims to keep nonreaders from slipping through school unnoticed, year after year. Under this

"Although biologically based, dyslexia and dysgraphia are treatable disorders."

—Virginia Berninger, University of Washington

plan, most kids will conquer reading in the regular classroom; only the most disabled readers will require diagnosis and special ed placement.

As described in the 2001 *Handbook of Psychoeducational Assessment* published by Academic Press, the model works as follows:

Tier 1—Screening for early intervention: Every K–2 student in the school is screened to ID those who are at risk for reading and writing problems. The screening measures are brief, but research-based. At-risk children get early intervention—but not just any intervention. It should be "science-based," Berninger and her colleagues insist. By that they mean the real McCoy—a "theory-driven experiment in which competing hypotheses are tested" in search of "empirical evidence that an intervention is effective in improving student learning outcomes." (See the UW brain imaging study cited below as an example.)

Tier 2—Modifying the regular instructional program and monitoring the progress of students: The classroom program is modified for students who don't respond well to Tier 1 intervention. That modification might take a number of forms: adding curriculum components, changing teaching practices, revising materials, and/or providing extra skills practice. The goal of Tier 2 is to determine whether all the essential curriculum pieces are in place and being delivered effectively. To monitor progress, schools can use curriculum-based measurements. The process is guided by a multidisciplinary collaborative team using a problem-solving approach to make ongoing changes as needed. Because learning problems cut across disciplines and specialties, a team might include the school psychologist, the special educator, the speech and language pathologist, the social worker, the nurse, the principal, the Title 1 teacher, and the general ed teacher.

Tier 3—Diagnosis and treatment of referred children: Students who failed to respond well to the first two tiers get a thorough assessment. The goals are to decide whether the child qualifies for special ed; to diagnose—based on current scientific knowledge—why the student is having trouble; and to design a systematic, coordinated treatment plan.

"Many reading and writing disabilities could be prevented or reduced in severity if a three-tier model of assessment for intervention were implemented in schools," Berninger and company assert. "The learning outcome for students with dyslexia and/or dysgraphia will be much better if schools do not wait until students fail for several years before beginning the process of assessment for intervention."

To figure out which kids are at risk and need intervention in the Tier 1 phase, the researchers recommend short screenings like the two-minute tests developed by Marilyn Jager Adams of the Harvard Graduate School of Education or the Texas Primary Reading Inventory developed at the University of Texas-Houston Medical School. (For more examples, see the online "Reading Assessment Database for Grades K–2" compiled by the Southeast Educational Development Laboratory, www.sedl.org/pubs/catalog/items/read02.html.) Berninger, too, has developed an assessment instrument as part of the Process Assessment of the Learner package, the *PAL Test Battery for Reading and Writing*, which can be used at each tier of the model.

At the Tier 3 stage, kids who haven't made gains despite the special help offered under Tier 1 or the curriculum tweaking done during Tier 2, should get an indepth assessment for learning disabilities. Berninger recommends using what she calls a "multimodal" approach, one that draws on many sources, many tools—for instance, interviewing parents. Scouring student records. Giving all sorts of tests (standardized, normed, and criterion-referenced). Meeting with the student. Looking at portfolios and work samples.

"A MESSAGE OF HOPE"

A small but burgeoning body of research backs up the tiered

approach. A statewide pilot project tested at 18 Washington schools, the Student Responsive Delivery System, is a Tier 2 model sponsored by the state office of public instruction, the Washington State Association of School Psychologists, and the Washington State Speech and Hearing Association. The model has reaped impressive gains, based on findings from the 1998–99 school year. Of the 215 students who participated in the collaborative problem-solving process, 138 students (64 percent) needed no further intervention. Their academic and/or behavioral troubles were resolved. The number of students who needed a full-blown assessment for special ed was axed by a staggering 73 percent across the pilot sites. Ultimately, only 28 students (13 percent) were placed in special ed.

Another study out of UW not only offers compelling evidence of promising strategies—it exemplifies a new generation of education research that rivals the rigor of medicine and other "hard" sciences. Fifteen 10- to 13-year-old boys in two matched groups—eight dyslexics and seven nondyslexics—participated in a yearlong treatment program designed by Berninger and her colleague Todd Richards to improve their skills in understanding and using the sounds of language. Reading instruction was blended into a hands-on workshop exploiting the boys' love of science. Images of their brains taken before and after the treatment found that the dyslexics' brain chemistry had changed significantly. At first, they used about four times the brain energy of their nondisabled counterparts to process sounds. Afterwards, they used only 1.8 times the brain energy—a huge leap in efficiency. The dyslexics also made big gains in reading. They all started out well below grade level. Yet, by the end, all but one could read grade-appropriate passages.

"This research offers a message of hope," Berninger said in 2000 when the findings were released. "Parents of the boys in the study told us that children who didn't read independently before are now picking up books on their own and reading them." □

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

LD kids have an ever-widening network of support and expertise in the Northwest

By LEE SHERMAN
Photos by JUDY BLANKENSHIP

The Student | The Parent Activist | The Teacher | The Tutor | The Researcher

Even for kids with no special problems, school can be pretty rough going. But add a learning disability to the mix. Suddenly, attending school can feel like climbing Mt. Everest without crampons or oxygen. It's not just a matter of mastering math and reading, or taking high-stakes tests, or vying for college admission when your brain isn't wired for literacy. It's also about confronting the cliques and the bullies when you get pegged as a "dummy."

Fortunately for today's LD child, the network of support is expanding. Growing numbers of parents and professionals throughout the Northwest are committing their time and expertise to making sure these students not only survive the academic and emotional rigors of K–12 education, but also reach the pinnacle of their potential.

In this section, *Northwest Education* shows you the human face of learning disabilities—the individuals who have dedicated themselves to changing outcomes for kids who might otherwise fail to find success. We profile a learning disabled student who has channeled his enormous energy into art and community activism. A parent who took on the mantle of advocacy as she strove to help her own dyslexic son. A teacher whose personal struggles with dyslexia have given him compassion for his LD students. A tutor who has made LD students her lifelong mission. And a researcher who has devoted decades to solving the cerebral mysteries of learning problems.

Evoking Some Hope

By his example, student Bryan Lewis demonstrates that the sky's the limit for LD kids

Bryan Lewis just sort of shrugs off his lifelong troubles with literacy skills. From Bryan's perspective, his learning disability is no more or less important than other traits that characterize him—his brown skin, his tall frame, his long hair, which he sometimes twists, strand-by-strand, into a dramatic mane. No more significant than his artistry with pencils and brushes—the way he sketches objects that pop off the page with 3-D realism or paints bold abstracts with unflinching colors. Or his steady gaze as he speaks of things that matter in a tone of quiet surety.

"The disability doesn't play much of a role in my life," the Cleveland High School junior class co-president says matter-of-factly. "I've kind of surpassed it. It's not something I think about."

To look at the nine-page résumé of Bryan's school and community accomplishments, you'd never guess that anything was amiss. From the Portland Public Schools arts magnets he attended in elementary and middle school, he went on to tackle one of the district's most demanding high school programs—the international baccalaureate. And, following a family tradition of activism, he has dived deeply into local social and political causes. Nearly every

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night of the week, he wedges some kind of civic meeting into his schedule. He's on the coordinating committee for the Multnomah County Youth Commission and on the steering committee for the county's Take the Time youth-enhancement project funded by the Commission on Children, Families, and Communities. He volunteers for the Portland Art Museum and writes for *The Oregonian* newspaper through its Minority High School Journalism Program. In 2001, when the city named Bryan "Youth Volunteer of the Year," the mayor herself was on hand to present him with the prestigious Spirit of Portland award. In response, *The Skanner*, a respected newspaper serving Portland's minority community, ran a big, front-page photo of Bryan posed in front of City Hall. The headline read "Local Hero."

Despite a struggle with language skills that led to a second-grade placement in special ed, Bryan managed to escape the emotional trauma and self-esteem pummeling that so many LD kids experience. The little boy was inoculated, it seems, by a solid pyramid of support. At the base of the pyramid were his mom Juanita and his dad Mark—Willamette University graduates who fell in love in grammar school and have been in love ever since. Mark—a teacher at Portland's Ockley Green Middle School—and Juanita—a tireless school advocate and volunteer who serves on the district's Special Education Advisory Council—insisted from Day One that being LD was only a small bump in the road, not a barrier. They made sure Bryan got appropriate accommodations—more time for assignments, a quiet space apart for high-stakes tests, small-group remediation once a day. They joined the Reversals support group at Lewis & Clark College (for more on Reversals, see the sidebar on Page 13). Perhaps most significantly, they taught Bryan to advocate for himself—to speak up, to make sure he was clear on assignments, to seek out help when he needed it. Says Juanita: "The disability has made him stronger, given him the confidence to say, 'This is how I am.' I have said to him many times over the years, 'Your brain takes in information differently and processes it differently. It has nothing to do with your intelligence or your abilities.'"

The arts magnet schools he attended—Buckman Elementary School and DaVinci Middle School—were ideal places for nurturing a gangly, gentle, creative kid whose inner drum beat out a unique cadence. "Buckman promoted individuality," says Juanita, who has been clearing away the last of the Christmas trim in the family's cozy Portland home on a drizzly January afternoon. "It was OK to be as you are. Because of the nature of the arts-infused curriculum—music, dance, drama, and art—those students felt very comfortable with each other and they felt very comfortable to take risks with each other. And they had wonderful, loving teachers."

The special ed teachers, in particular, have been standouts in Juanita's estimation. "Bryan has been very fortunate since second grade to have outstanding special ed teachers—teachers who are wonderful human beings that bring strong values and work ethic and love for children to their jobs," Juanita says.

Whether from nature or nurture, at Bryan's center rests a calm core of unshakable confidence. Being learning disabled causes him no shame. His current special ed teacher, whom he sees once a week for consultation, recently told Juanita that when her other students pass her in the hall, they look uncomfortable and avoid her gaze. "They don't want their friends to know they're receiving services," Juanita relates. Bryan, on the other hand, "never flinches" when she approaches him, always greeting her cordially. He treats her as a partner, not a pariah.

Recently, Bryan shared his views and experiences with *Northwest Education*. Below are some excerpts from that discussion.

NORTHWEST EDUCATION: Can you briefly describe your home life?

BRYAN LEWIS: We live in the Alameda district, near the ridge. It's a quiet community, pretty peaceful, pretty nonviolent. My younger sister is in the pre-law program at Franklin High School. My dad is a PE and health teacher who spends a lot of time trying to build community, talking about the necessity of education, bringing parents into the school, trying to be a role model and a father figure to the students. My mother focuses mainly on my sister's and my existence. She regularly attends the Reversals support group. It's been a driving force for her to understand what's going on with me and how to overcome stereotypes about students with disabilities and academics and going to college.

> "You can do whatever you want, be whatever you want, even with this learning disability."

NW: Do you remember what your earliest years in school were like?

LEWIS: Usually, I was goofing around or spacing out. At the beginning, I didn't see a reason for learning. I didn't really pay much attention because I didn't understand that I needed to. When I *was*

paying attention, when I *was* taking the information in, it was gone the next day.

NW: What was the diagnosis you got in second grade?

LEWIS: They said I had a learning disability involved with language.

NW: How did the disability play out in your classroom experience?

LEWIS: The paragraphs on the page, the text, didn't really form letters—they formed *shapes*. They were whatever my imagination made them.

NW: You mean that you experienced the blocks of text as visual patterns on the page, rather than seeing discrete letters and words with meaning?

LEWIS: Yes.

NW: Was it your choice or your parents' to enroll in the arts magnet?

LEWIS: It was my choice, but my parents supported me in it. I was good at art, and it was fun—pleasing. I felt I was accomplishing something. Art was the one way that I understood to express myself.

NW: Did other kids hassle you about your learning problems?

LEWIS: They teased me, but it didn't really have anything to do with my concept of myself, with my self-worth. My parents helped me to understand that teasing was just how those kids got out their aggression.

NW: It sounds like you kind of sailed through school without many storms. Does your experience match the experiences of other LD kids you know?

LEWIS: No. They had very different experiences. They have told me very distraught stories. I know many LD kids who are just now, in high school, understanding their self-worth, understanding how they fit into the big picture.

NW: In your early years, you were pulled out of your core classroom once a day for remedial work in a resource room. Do you think that approach was helpful to you?

LEWIS: It took a lot of time out of the class, out of the curriculum, and I think I actually suffered a little because of that. Some would say, 'What's the point of taking a student out of the curriculum to catch them up to it?' I would tend to agree with that.

NW: But you're doing well now. You made the honor roll your first semester in high school. So clearly, you have caught up.

LEWIS: A lot of the catching up that has been done has been done by me. I realized that I'm going to need to take care of myself and provide for myself. There are things I care about, and if I want to do those things, I'll have to get a job and have an income. I'll need an education to do that. So I basically started paying attention.

NW: Why did you choose the international baccalaureate program, knowing that it would be pretty tough?

LEWIS: For the intensity—I knew it would prepare me for college. Initially, there was some skepticism about whether or not I could perform because of my disability. But my first year in high school proved to anyone who doubted that I could certainly do it. My GPA was a 3.7, and I made many friends and contacts. I did what I was called upon to do.

NW: What's your biggest passion outside school, besides your art?

LEWIS: Most of my time is consumed with activism. Sometimes it isn't a lot of fun—long meetings, rallies, organizing, canvassing. But I do it not only because no one else is going to do it, but because it's the right thing. There's a meeting tonight for planning how to rally voters and youth for Measure 28 to try to save the schools. [EDITOR'S NOTE: Oregon Ballot Measure 28, which would have raised income taxes temporarily to address a statewide funding crisis was defeated by voters in January.]

NW: Do you expect to expand your activism beyond the local community?

LEWIS: One of my goals is to start an international activist network, where those who are heavily involved in activism have a place to go and rally with others. It would be a starting point for those who are just becoming enlightened about what's going on in the world of government and politics.

NW: What are your plans for after high school?

LEWIS: I have standards for where I want to go to college, but I haven't chosen any particular place. I'm looking at Stanford, Evergreen State College, Lewis & Clark, Willamette, and Seattle Pacific. I'm looking for a college that has room for me to grow, room for me to decide what I'm going to do. I'm looking for a true environment, a real environment, and a bustling city with culture and politics.

NW: What message would you like to share with other LD kids?

LEWIS: I really think that if kids understood that you can do whatever you want, be whatever you want, even with this learning disability, it would evoke some hope. □

"I'VE SEEN IT WORK MAGIC"

When Juanita Lewis found out that her son Bryan's struggles in school stemmed from a learning disability, she discovered a haven of hope in the Reversals parent support group, sponsored by the Oregon branch of the International Dyslexia Association. It was there—through lectures, discussions, and video presentations—that she came to better understand the nature of Bryan's special way of processing information.

"Reversals is very comforting," Juanita Lewis says. "It's wonderful to talk to other parents and get their perspective." Through the group, she also got to know LD students who have made it to the university despite their learning problems. They gave her heart. She saw that all doors were open for her child's future.

"I knew that at some point along his journey, someone was going to tell him that he's not measuring up—that he can't go to college, that he won't make it," Juanita says. "I've said to myself, 'Thank God for Reversals, because maybe I'd have believed that.'"

On Saturday afternoons once a month, the "fearless leaders" (teacher education students from Lewis & Clark College, many of them learning disabled) meet with younger LD kids for age-appropriate activities. At the same time, the group's coordinator Dale Holloway meets with parents to share resources, strategies, and support.

Holloway, Coordinator of Student Support Services at the college, sets out the program's guiding philosophy as follows:

- People who learn differently are not in any way "inferior" to others.
- They are at an advantage when they learn about and accept their learning differences.
- They benefit when they learn to take responsibility for their own learning.
- They benefit when they use their unique ways of looking at the world in positive and productive ways.

Bryan, now a towering high school junior who stands 6-feet, 5-inches tall, has been involved in Reversals since he was just a little guy. He knows its power firsthand.

"I've seen it work magic," he says.

For more information on the Reversals groups, call (503) 228-4455 or 1-800-530-2234, or visit the Welcome to Reversals Web site at www.lclark.edu/~reversal.

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From Personal Advocacy to Public Activism

In her quest to help her dyslexic son, Betsy Ramsey found a calling for all LD kids

Twenty years ago, as Betsy Ramsey's firstborn child lay cradled in her arms at Portland's Kaiser Hospital, she wondered about the world of possibilities within that warm little bundle. What she could never have imagined was that her bright-eyed baby boy would lead her to become a major Oregon voice for kids with learning disabilities.

At first, all seemed well in the family's solid, inner-city home. Ramsey, a half-time cancer researcher at the Oregon Health Sciences University, and her engineer husband Don Ruff, had no reason to suspect a problem with their smart, funny, active son Jon, who relished the storybooks his parents read to him daily. But the couple started to worry when, despite an all-day, enriched preschool program, four-year-old Jon's prereading skills were nil. A teacher's reassurances quelled their concerns as he entered kindergarten. But by the end of his first-grade year in a dual-language Spanish immersion program, the little boy still couldn't decipher the symbols and sounds of the printed word. When reading continued to elude him well into second grade, the school placed him in a resource room for one hour, twice a week, for help overcoming what they termed a "specific learning disability."

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It wasn't until Ramsey and Ruff had the child evaluated by a specialist with Portland's Language Skills Therapy tutoring program that they got a precise diagnosis: Jon had "dyslexia," a barely familiar term to them in those days. (See Page 22 for more on the Language Skills Therapy program.) The disability was moderately severe, the specialist said. So for the next four years, Jon's parents paid for thrice-a-week private tutoring to supplement the help he got at school.

In the meantime, Ramsey had started to educate herself on the complexities and vagaries of special education—the research, the terminology, the law—and the current strategies for teaching kids with learning disabilities. As part of that process, she dove headlong into an activist role. Serving on the school district's parent advisory council in special education for more than a decade, she also chaired the local site councils at Ainsworth Elementary and Lincoln High School and did a stint on the citizens' budget review committee. Her growing expertise put her in demand outside the district, as well, where she has served on such statewide bodies as the Oregon 21st Century Schools Council, the Oregon Reading Consortium and, currently, the Oregon Reading First Leadership Team, which is advising the Oregon Department of Education on allocation of federal funds under the No Child Left Behind Act. The governor appointed her to the Oregon Advisory Council to Special Education, which she chaired last year. And she's now serving a two-year term as president of the Oregon Branch of the International Dyslexia Association.

As for her child, the little boy who couldn't read is now majoring in international studies and Spanish at the University of Oregon. Nearly fluent in Spanish, Jon Ruff is spending his junior year in Cuernavaca, Mexico, fulfilling his degree requirement for study abroad.

Sitting in the family's 1910 Craftsman-style bungalow, recalling the road she has traveled with her son, Ramsey recently shared her travails and hard-won insights with *Northwest Education*.

NORTHWEST EDUCATION: How did you feel in those early days when Jon was struggling in school?

BETSY RAMSEY: You feel kind of desperate when your kid's really hurting. You feel panicked because you know he only gets to go through school—through childhood—one time, and it's all messed up. You don't *want* it to be all messed up for him. You want to fix it. When your child is born with a learning disability, it's a hidden disability. You think you have this perfect child—he has all 10 fingers and toes and sparkling eyes. He's walking at the right age and talking at the right age. You have all these dreams and aspirations for him. And then all of a sudden it hits you, and you have to face the reality that what you thought you had, you *don't* have. You just have to change your thinking. You have to accept this person for who he is and then set about to make him as successful as his potential will allow. In our case, as in many cases, that potential is far greater than you can imagine when you see all the hurdles ahead.

NW: Was the twice-weekly pullout with a resource teacher an adequate intervention on the school's part?

RAMSEY: No. Jon needed specific instruction in reading, writing, spelling, and math. And he needed it every day. But we didn't know enough about the special education laws at the time to argue with the school that he should have more than he was getting. People at the school were really nice and well-meaning, but they didn't know that much about working with LD kids—and I think we had some of the better-trained teachers out there. One of the big problems in the field of learning disabilities is that teachers are very poorly prepared in the current system to deal with it, especially in the general classroom. They have very, very little background in how to teach kids who learn differently. Sometimes, these kids learn so differently and think so differently from the way the teacher thinks that she can't even *imagine* how they learn. Teachers need to take an inquiry approach to problem solving around that kid—trying different things, measuring progress, and then trying something else if that doesn't work.

NW: Is it realistic to expect teachers to address all these learning styles?

RAMSEY: It's a very, very difficult job. Teachers have many, many kids with many, many needs in their classrooms. But it goes to the whole idea of multiple intelligences—we all have strengths and weaknesses. Dyslexics happen to have weaknesses in reading—one particular task that's hard for them to do—which happens to be a crucial skill in our culture. Because reading is something that is so integral to success in our society today, people who can't do it have great difficulties in life. If we lived in a hunter-gatherer culture, it wouldn't matter. In fact, people like Jon might have certain kinds of advantages in their thinking that would actually make them highly successful in a nonreading culture. I've often used the example of music: What if music—carrying a tune—

was the skill you had to have to be successful in life? Musical ability is just another set of neurological skills that some people come by naturally. How many of us would succeed if that were the standard?

NW: You mentioned the neurological roots of dyslexia. Brain research has recently shed a lot of light on this disability, which until recently has been poorly understood.

RAMSEY: Yes. For many years—and still, for many people—it was considered a moral failing of the individual: They're not trying, they could do better if they only worked harder. Yet in fact, they're working harder than anybody else because of the wiring in their brain. (For more on current brain research, see the interview with University of Washington researcher Virginia Berninger on Page 26.)

NW: In addition to hiring a tutor, were there other things you pursued on Jon's behalf?

RAMSEY: Right after we hired the tutor, Don happened to meet a dyslexia expert who told him about a support group at Lewis & Clark College for LD kids and their families. It's called Reversals. We started going as a family and learned all about IDEA and all the things you need to do to be a good parent of an LD child. That's where we gained the expectation that Jon could succeed and go to college, because it didn't really look like that was possible at the time. Meanwhile, I kept reading to him every night through middle school. We also started him on a regular program of listening to books on tape from the Oregon State Library for the Blind. I would check out the print version of the book at the county library, and Jon would read along with the tape. It really improved his vocabulary, syntax, and fluency. We had a Spanish-speaking friend who read his Spanish-immersion textbooks aloud to him, and other people taped textbooks for him. A lot of people helped out.

NW: What about the nonacademic arena?

RAMSEY: Parents need to find out what their kid is good at—to make sure he's successful at something. For my kid, it was music. He played the string bass. But his high school didn't have an orchestra program, so I started an orchestra as a before-school club. We had 20 kids. I hired a director and raised money through the booster club to pay her. I did all the attendance and organizing. Jon went on to play in the Portland Youth Philharmonic for five years.

NW: So Jon was pretty lucky. He got a lot of specialized help and support starting in second grade. Many LD kids, however, don't get identified until much later.

RAMSEY: Most dyslexic kids aren't identified til third, fourth, fifth grade. That's too late. The research shows that if you're not reading by third grade, you're going to have a lot of trouble. And the longer you wait, the more emotional problems you have to deal with. There are basically two kinds of kids—those whose behavior brings them to attention and those who fake their way through. The kids who act out tend to get identified earlier. But a lot of other kids, especially girls, will fool the teacher. They'll memorize passages ahead of time, for instance, and then when it's their turn to read aloud, they'll pretend to be reading. Jon tells a story about being in SSR (silent sustained reading). He'd sit there with his book, pretending to read, looking around at the other kids and wondering, "How do they *do* it?" I feel so *bad* for these kids!

NW: Can you talk about the emotional damage that happens to kids who struggle along without appropriate intervention?

RAMSEY: If you've got a kid who's acting out, he needs a thorough evaluation to see if the problem is really an underlying disability. You really have to look deep to see what's troubling him. If you don't deal with the disability, you'll never properly address the emotional issues. The problem with the current system—and this is beginning to change—is that there's this "wait to fail" policy. My son had to fail to learn to read before he could get help. Over and over again, we ask these kids to fail, and when we see that they've failed, we'll try something else. What will serve us better is when we can identify these kids when they're four or five years old and start working with them then—and then, all the way through school, accommodate their learning differences. They'll never develop these emotional problems because they will be successful from the start. If they have early intervention, many of them will actually be able to go on and do standard work. This approach is being talking about in Congress with the reauthorization of IDEA, and there's also a lot of this thinking in the Reading First program enacted as part of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. It's much easier to turn things around when kids are little than to wait til they fail.

NW: How can schools identify learning disabilities in very young children?

RAMSEY: There are two tests—a phonemic awareness test and a letter-naming test—you can give to five-year-olds that will predict pretty closely how they're going to be reading at third grade. Each test takes about five minutes. Some districts in Oregon are screening all kindergart-

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ners. You will over-identify a few kids, but it's really worth it to find those kids who have those weaknesses *before* they start learning to read. Then you can give intervention *as* they're learning to read. The Bethel School District in Eugene has applied this principle, and 95 percent of their kids are reading at a third-grade level by third grade. They're working on the other 5 percent right now. (See the article on Bethel's approach on Page 30.)

NW: You and your husband were able to afford to pay for tutors and other help for Jon. But what about families without resources?

RAMSEY: I'm involved right now with a group that's doing tutoring at Humboldt Elementary, Jefferson High School, and a couple of other schools in low-income neighborhoods. It's an outreach project of the Oregon Branch of the International Dyslexia Association called One-on-One Works. We got an $8,000 grant from the Collins Foundation to pay highly trained tutors to work with those kids. But it's sort of a drop in the puddle. □

A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

My buddy Trevor yells at me from the kitchen. "Jon, read me the label of the bottle you're holding."

I, in a not-quite-confident voice, begin to read out loud stumbling over every other word. "*Man-ufa-ctu-red in Colombia with co-mpon-ents from*..."

Trevor laughs. "Jon, still can't read."

I laugh back. "Nope, still can't read."

This occurrence at age 20 with two-thirds of my college degree done is funny, because of course I can read. I got a 3.5 GPA last semester and am fluent in Spanish. But when I was in elementary school and truly could not read, something like that was not so funny. School at that time in my life was not interesting and challenging, like I find it now, but rather something that made me cry. I remember sitting through SSR (silent sustained reading) for 30 minutes bored out of my mind because all I could do was look at the words. I had no concept of what they meant. I also remember the embarrassment of getting called out of class to go to the resource room for "special" help. The kids were jealous that I got to get out of class until they found out where I went and what I did. Then they just laughed. It wasn't laughter like me and my buddy Trevor share when we discover my little oddities, but a hurtful laugh because it was at me.

But kids are cruel, right? Dealing with my learning disability was hard for me when I was younger, not because I was doing horrible in school and still couldn't read but because I was different from the rest. It's funny now looking back on it because I could have turned out to be a cry-y eyed, depressed young man. But I didn't. If you were to ask any of my friends or professors now, I don't think they would describe me like that at all.

I wish I could put my finger on the one thing the helped me appreciate myself and allowed me to be successful, but I can't. It was a combination of many factors. Of course, I'd have to give most of the credit to my parents, who never gave up on me and supported me through thick and thin. To this day, they still give me as much support as they can. But it was also the help of teachers, counselors, and friends that ultimately got me through.

—By Jonathan Ruff
University of Oregon

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Seeing Yourself Sitting There

Teacher Dan Tibbetts draws upon the wounds he got and the wisdom he won growing up with dyslexia

Hell-bent on discovery, Danny Tibbetts couldn't wait to ditch his books and head out after school. Lying on his stomach in the reedy marsh near his suburban home, the little boy learned firsthand about the habitat and life cycle of frogs. Tinkering in the dusty half-light of the garage, he uncovered the inner workings of small engines. Scavenging scraps of wood and metal, he designed and built all sorts of wheeled rigs powered by batteries and imagination. Those were his happy hours.

His classroom hours, however, were agonizing. Danny got off to a bad start, failing to nail down his ABCs and having to repeat kindergarten. Things never got much better. After years of pullout remediation and private tutoring, he gained the ability to decode words up to a third-grade level. But when he left high school at age 18 without a diploma, he still couldn't read for comprehension.

Danny's story, however, doesn't end with a low-wage job at a car wash or pizza parlor. This most unlikely candidate for college, deeply determined not to be "a loser," eventually made his way to the university. And the boy who couldn't decipher even the most basic basal readers ended up in the most unlikely of places—back in the public school

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classroom. This time, though, he stands at the front of a class full of kids he understands as well as he understands himself. That's because, like him, his students in the Intensive Learning Center at Portland's Beaumont Middle School are all learning disabled.

"These kids often come in at the first-grade level, across the board, in their language arts skills," says Dan Tibbetts, catching a brief respite at his desk while his 12 students, mostly boys, labor over sentence construction. "They can't read a lick, they can't write a lick. Somehow, they got to sixth grade. They should have been in a program like this a long time ago."

The "program like this" blends direct instruction in the skills of reading and writing—beginning with the fundamental building blocks of letter recognition and phonemic awareness—with lots of behavior management and one-to-one attention. The curriculum draws on the very strategies that turned things around for Tibbetts when, at age 19, he enrolled in a program at Portland Community College for nonreading adults. "The curriculum was based on *Corrective Reading* from Science Research Associates," he says. "Boy, that's when things really kicked up for me."

Once the trick to reading clicked in, Tibbetts became a committed bibliophile. Now 40, he pores voraciously over print materials of all kinds, particularly biography, philosophy, and current events—with a special love for the history of rock 'n' roll. In another wry twist of destiny, Tibbetts this year wears the coordinator's hat for the school's talented and gifted program. At Beaumont Middle School, where he passes on his hard-won wisdom to his emotionally bruised LD students, his wife Rebekah also teaches kids with special needs. Here, Dan Tibbetts tells the story of his personal and professional struggles and successes.

NORTHWEST EDUCATION: Do you remember how you felt as a young child who couldn't master reading skills?

DANIEL TIBBETTS: Oh, man, it was so tough on me, and pretty rough on my parents. I was hurt by the whole thing. Kids teased me, so I acted out.

NW: How did you to act out?

TIBBETTS: I was very goofy. I liked getting attention for being funny. I got in trouble for *everything*— it didn't matter what class I was in. I couldn't memorize; I couldn't recite the flag salute. I got in trouble for not paying attention. I got spankings from the principal. Psychologists call these negative behaviors that LD kids get caught up in "schemas." They're scripts—built-in programs that come back and play out under stress.

NW: What kinds of strategies did the school try out in an effort to get you on track?

TIBBETTS: In second grade, a specialist from the University of Oregon came in to teach a phonics based program using flip charts for teaching phonemes, sounds, blending, mastery words. They would pull out a couple of kids and take us over to the corner of the classroom. It was embarrassing, because everyone could hear us. They probably would have gotten 80 percent more out of me and the other kids if we'd been off in a place where other students weren't watching us or listening to us. No one wants to flaunt their wounds in front of their peers. That's one of the problems with the inclusion model, where LD kids are served in the regular classroom.

NW: So you don't think it's possible effectively to serve LD kids in the regular classroom?

TIBBETTS: I believe that there are methods of instruction that can be used that will catch all of the kids pretty well in the regular setting, but they're not used. They are methods such as direct instruction that are not popular. But if you use them, and use them right, a couple of hours a day for the elementary years of a kid's schooling, they have been proven effective with validated data.

NW: Why is direct instruction so unpopular among many educators?

TIBBETTS: It's dry. But it works. It's a method of disciplined instruction based on mastery learning. You don't go on to Step 2 till you've mastered Step 1. You start at the student's skill level, correct errors right away, review as you go along, and fill in any gaps. It builds a real strong foundation.

"Psychologists call these negative behaviors that LD kids get caught up in 'schemas.' They're scripts—built-in programs that come back and play out under stress."

NW: Were other strategies tried?

TIBBETTS: I had all the bells and whistles growing up as an LD kid. By my third-grade year, my parents got me a tutor. In fourth grade, I got into the Chapter 1 reading program.

NW: Why didn't the resource room approach work for you?

TIBBETTS: Kids who have damn-near grade-level skills and just need someone to help them close that little gap in their regular schoolwork need a resource teacher to help them

achieve their mainstream goals. But when you have a kid who's several years behind, they can't keep up, no matter what, in that regular classroom. I know from personal experience; I know because I hung out with those kids growing up; I know because I've been a professional in the field for 15 years and I've read tons about it. Full inclusion is ineffective for remediating basic skill deficits. I can tell you that when a kid is way behind in their skills in reading and writing and general knowledge, they're not going to be able to keep up with their average peers. It's embarrassing and frustrating for everyone—the student, the teacher, the parents. Students with severe learning disabilities nearly always require intensive individual or small-group instruction for at least a portion of the day.

NW: Were there bright spots in your school experience?

TIBBETTS: When I was in middle school we moved from Beaverton to Hillsboro (Oregon). It was a smaller school, 400 kids, with a lot of really great teachers. Although I wasn't learning a lot of skills in reading and math, I was gaining a lot of knowledge. In high school, I got into a vocational program where I got credit for work experience in a music store selling band instruments. I learned to play the guitar and got into rock and roll; that gave me a *ton* of confidence. I said to myself, "If I can do *this*, I know I can do other things."

NW: You didn't receive a high school diploma, yet you went to college. How did that come about?

TIBBETTS: When high school was over, I had this sense that, "Man, I don't want to be a loser." I thought about it for a year, and I knew I had to do something. I knew the first thing I had to do was learn to read. So one day when I was 19, I got together with my aunt, who's a teacher, and my dad, and I said, "I can't read." My aunt had a friend at Lewis & Clark College, an instructor in the school psychology program, who evaluated me and diagnosed my learning disability. She steered me to Portland Community College, where they had a specialist who was teaching LD students to read, write, and spell. I relearned all of the phonemes from scratch. I worked *hard* at it—man, I worked *really* hard. They met with you every week, they phoned you, they helped you get the credits you needed. And wow, things just really started turning and really cruised for me. I became independent very quickly, within a year. I always made sure I got an A or a B. I got enough credits to go to a four-year university.

NW: Where did you go to college?

TIBBETTS: I went to Southern Oregon College (now Southern Oregon State University). It was in the early, early '80s. I was, believe it or not, one of the very first LD adults to get to college and have advocacy behind me. With my documented learning disability, I got accommodations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—extra time for tests and assignments, more attention from instructors. Meanwhile, the university started up a student disability union—back then, they called it Handicapped Student Services. I was hired to assist the director. I didn't know anything about computers when I started, but I helped put together a computer lab with Commodore 64s and in the process learned to use the computer. That's what really helped me get through college.

NW: What are the most important skills that you strive to impart to your LD students at Beaumont?

TIBBETTS: The National Institutes of Health research (see "Letting Kids' Gifts Shine Through," Page 22) found that kids who have reading difficulties don't decode well. It's hard for them to break words down and link them up, chain them together. And you also need the ability to think, not just call back facts from the texts you've read. You have to be able to use basic logic, induction, deduction, inference. You have to be able to categorize, draw analogies, compare and contrast. You have to apply temporal concepts, measurement, math, and social skills. By far the most phenomenal task the brain does is to comprehend what you read. You have all these different brain centers going on simultaneously. But LD kids most likely don't have all those little filing cabinets in their brain with labels like "temporal concepts—before, now, after"—all the things that have to touch each other. I have to teach the kids all that stuff. I use the comprehension strand of the Corrective Reading curriculum called "Basic Thinking."

NW: What do you like best about working with LD kids?

TIBBETTS: I get my rewards by seeing the little, teeny bits of progress the kids make each day turn into big progress over time. Using this approach, and using it right, I've almost never had a kid who hasn't made good progress. (See the sidebar on Page 21 for comments from parents of Tibbetts's students.) □

"THANK YOU, MR. TIBBETTS"

Here are a few of the comments from parents of students who have been placed in Dan Tibbetts's Intensive Learning Center at Portland's Beaumont Middle School:

- "The difference this program has made in my son's life is beyond measure. In one year he has gone from terrified to triumphant."
- "Prior to the ILC, our son was beginning to lose his self-confidence, feeling overwhelmed by school demands and beginning to believe that he was stupid. To see him beginning to fall apart was very difficult for us. Having the opportunity to work with Dan Tibbetts has completely restored our faith in the educational system. Excellent teachers who know how to work successfully with learning disabilities really do exist! Perhaps even more importantly, Dan Tibbetts has helped our son reestablish the confidence he once had by providing an appropriate curriculum that really works, implementing it in a way that enabled him to succeed in areas he found impossible, and providing the care and support of a safe and enriching learning environment."
- "Our son has made excellent headway this year in Dan Tibbetts's class."
- "I will walk, send letters and e-mails, give speeches, carry banners, contact anybody and everybody to assure a future for and expansion of these classes."

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Letting Kids' Gifts Shine Through

Under Kay Kaplan's tutelage, dyslexic children can free their intellect and creativity from the constraints of disability

On the day a third-grader named Matt sat down for his first private lesson in sounds and letters, Kay Kaplan's career had, in a sense, come full circle. This little boy — who couldn't read a single word despite doing first grade twice—had, quite unexpectedly, brought her back to the professional goal she cherished, but lost, some 20 years before: to teach gifted children.

Matt had an IQ that hovered in the rarified realm of genius. But his brilliant brain wasn't wired for the printed word. After two decades of work with dyslexic children, Kaplan knew just what to do to help this child fulfill his huge potential.

But there was a time when she *hadn't* known what to do.

Her first assignment in a "really bad district" in New York was to teach language arts to the lowest-performing eighth-graders—the "bottom of the barrel," Kaplan recalls. The staff called them the "eight/nines," a reference to their abysmal reading levels on standardized tests.

"Here I was, ready to teach plot, and most of these kids were at the first- and second-grade reading level," Kaplan says, sipping tea as she reminisces in the English Tudor home she shares with her biophysicist husband in Old Portland. "I had

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no clue what to do. They couldn't spell, they couldn't write, they didn't know the alphabet, so they couldn't even put the spelling words in alphabetical order."

After a few months of frustration, she rummaged through her students' records looking for clues. What she found stunned her: The worst readers and spellers in the bunch had the highest IQs—normal and above.

But it wasn't until she returned to her hometown of Portland a few years later that she finally, serendipitously, came upon an answer to the enigma. A young woman sitting beside Kaplan on a city bus told her about a teacher named Dorothy Whitehead in the Beaverton School District who was getting great results with LD kids using a method called Orton-Gillingham (see the sidebar on Page 25). After volunteering at the school for a year, Kaplan joined Language Skills Therapy, a Portland-based group of professional tutors founded by Whitehead. Today, Kaplan coordinates the nonprofit organization—the first of its kind in the country—which employs 25 tutors.

When Matt's frantic parents found Kaplan, the child was enrolled in the Talented and Gifted program at one of Portland's top elementary schools. Yet, the third-grader's only literacy skill was the ability to write his name. But under Kaplan's tutelage, he "just soaked it up—he was like a sponge," she recalls, relishing this story of student success. In fifth grade, despite being unable to memorize his times tables, Matt got the school's highest math score on the district standardized test. "He could read the math problem and look at the four possible answers," she says. "His reasoning was so good that he could just estimate what it was."

Matt earned straight A's in middle and high school, and went on to graduate *summa cum laude* from California Maritime Academy in Vallejo, where the boy who couldn't memorize his times tables not only received an award in math, but was voted "most likely to succeed in marine architecture."

Kaplan ran into Matt's mom and dad not long ago. Her face lights up when she shares their news; to her, it feels pretty personal. "Matt," she says, "wants to teach."

Sitting in her elegant blue-and-white living room, surrounded by the Japanese art she collects, Kaplan tells the story of the career she has dedicated to dyslexic kids.

NW EDUCATION: What did you do in those early days to try to help the "eight/nines"?

KAY KAPLAN: I went to the reading specialist in the district and asked her about them, and she said, "Oh, they come from bad homes, or they're not very smart." She just basically dismissed them. About January, I looked up the IQs of these 15 kids—they were all boys—and it was an epiphany. It was this life-changing event, because what I discovered was that my two star students—the ones who read the best and wrote the best and spelled the best—were in the 80 range for IQ. And the worst students had average or above average IQs—in some cases, quite high.

NW: So what did you do then?

KAPLAN: I went back to visit the reading expert and tossed this information at her, and she looked at me as if I were totally crazy—as if to say, "What *are* you talking about?" I was trying to get her to explain what this meant—why is it that the lowest-ability kids were the best readers? She just absolutely blew me off. But it was the question that stuck with me from then on.

NW: So you felt that the school was making no effort to understand or help this group of kids?

KAPLAN: I had a boy in my eight/nine class named Dennis. He was one of the better-behaved little boys in the class, and I liked Dennis. One day, some of the other teachers were sitting in the teachers lounge talking about the eight/nines—one of the teachers had them for social studies and one had them for math. They were talking about what a sorry lot they were, and they said something mean about Dennis. I said something in his defense, and they said, "Well, he's a vegetable." I was *so, so* horrified. And they said, "Well, have you gotten any work from Dennis—anything besides a piece of paper with his name at the top?" I had to admit that I hadn't.

NW: What did you do then?

KAPLAN: A couple of days later, I had the students write paragraphs—a description of a place they loved. I parked myself right beside Dennis. He had written his name at the top of his paper, and that's all. I said, "It's really hard, isn't it?" He said, "I can't." I said something about writer's block. He said, "No, I can't do it." Finally, I said, "Dennis, you mean you literally don't know how to write?" He said, "No." He was in the eighth grade. So I said, "You tell me what to write, and I'll write it down for you." So he said: "I love to go fishing. I love the feel of the moist earth under my feet." That was not the work of a vegetable. I said, "Dennis, that's really descriptive! You're a poet!" A big smile came over his face. I taught for a few more years in New York and then in California, and I kept running into kids with the same syndrome—kids with a similar kind of profile. I just kept trying to figure them out.

NW: Had you received any

training in college about dealing with learning disabilities?

KAPLAN: When I was in school for my education degree, I was specifically told there is no such thing as a learning disability. They called it a "wastebasket" term.

NW: Once you got into the tutoring program, however, things started to turn around for you.

KAPLAN: Dorothy Whitehead had adapted the Orton-Gillingham method—this great system for teaching LD kids—for use by volunteers. She was training people to use it at Barnes Elementary School in Beaverton. I drove out to Barnes for a year and worked with a little boy named Danny. It worked. He learned to read. It was such a wonderful thing finally to have a technique that would actually help these kids instead of just keeping them busy.

NW: Advocates point out that learning disabilities are neurologically based, yet the solution is educationally based. Does this put unreasonable expectations on teachers?

KAPLAN: Education changes the neurology of the brain for *all* kids, so teachers are doing that all the time. It's just that these kids have a somewhat different neurological makeup than others. I'm convinced that all of us have at least one learning disability. These kids just seem to have the anomaly that stands out the most. There may come a time when we can treat it by manipulating genes, but right now all we can do is help them learn things in a different way.

NW: But the teachers you ran into in New York, at least, didn't believe that these kids could learn.

KAPLAN: Very often, teachers don't have a good working definition of what dyslexia means. Often, they think the kids just aren't very bright —even though dyslexia is absolutely irrelevant to IQ. I've worked with dyslexic kids who have an IQ of 135, and I've worked with dyslexic kids who have an IQ of 80. There's no connection. Yet, many teachers see these kids as just being "low," period.

NW: And the kids tend to buy into this perception of themselves, right?

KAPLAN: What they think is that they're dumb. They tend to generalize their problem. It's often a huge leap for them if you can actually put a name on it and say: "These are the things that will probably cause you problems—for example, reading, writing, spelling. But in the other things—creativity, problem solving, thinking—you're probably better at it than most of the rest of us." You can honestly say that to them.

NW: What should schools be doing to catch these kids before they fail?

KAPLAN: In the ideal world, schools test kids for phonemic awareness in kindergarten, and then get a highly phonemic reading program that is tiered. If kids have problems, they get special help, up to and including private tutoring in a method like Orton-Gillingham or Alphabetic Phonics or Slingerland (see sidebar), one-to-one, if necessary. If we did this, we would save huge amounts of money. I look at the money the school district has spent on special education for students I tutor—thousands and thousands of dollars a year—and in many cases, if the school had done the appropriate thing in first grade, they wouldn't even qualify for special ed.

NW: Is there a body of research findings to back up this approach?

KAPLAN: What the National Institutes of Health studies on reading have found is that kids who struggle in reading need to be taught phonics directly in a systematic way. (For more details on these findings, see the 2000 report from the National Reading Panel titled *Teaching Children To Read: An Evidence Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction.)* This is the exact opposite of what most teachers have been taught to do. The whole-language movement that came in like a tidal wave several decades ago argues that because all normal children learn to talk by being in a rich environment of language, all children will learn to read and write in exactly the same way. You just surround them with wonderful literature. Because of this wonderful brain that these children have, this wonderful capacity for language, they will automatically learn to read and write. Wonderful things came out of this belief: "language experience," for example, where kids in kindergarten would tell you stories and you would write it down. Instead of these boring, dull phonics pages, there was a rocking chair and pillows and the carpet and the Big Books. And you had "guess and go" spelling. All of that is terrific. Kids with good visual memory for words and kids on the top end of the scale for grasping the phonemic code took off. But the other kids who were often just as bright—or even way brighter—who had weak visual memory for symbols and could not attach letters to the code were dead in the water. Still, people kept saying, "They'll get it—it's developmental, just like speech." I probably would have bought the whole-language thing had I not met the eight/nines. Because of those kids, I absolutely *knew* it wasn't true. □

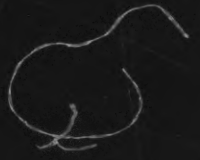
SWITCHING ON THE LIGHT OF LITERACY

Beginning nearly 80 years ago, researchers and practitioners have worked to devise methods for teaching language skills to dyslexic children and adults. Among the most widely known approaches are these:

• **Orton-Gillingham.** Developed by neuropsychiatrist Samuel Orton and educator Anna Gillingham, beginning with Orton's studies of dyslexic kids in the early 1900s, the Orton-Gillingham approach is a structured, multisensory, language-based method that allows students to experience a high degree of success in every lesson. Teaching sessions are action-oriented with auditory, visual, and kinesthetic elements reinforcing each other for optimal learning," according to the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators based in New York. The method, designed for one-to-one tutoring, forms the foundation for many other approaches, including those described below. For more information, contact the academy by phone at (845) 373-8919, by e-mail at info@ortonacademy.org, or on the Web at www.ortonacademy.org.

• **Slingerland.** The Slingerland Multisensory Approach is an adaptation for classroom use of the Orton-Gillingham method developed by Beth Slingerland, who first received training in Orton-Gillingham in Montana's Glacier National Park in 1935. She went on to found the nonprofit Slingerland Institute for Literacy in Bellevue, Washington, where teachers are trained to "provide the specialized instruction needed for children with dyslexia to unlock the rich world of written and spoken language." For more information, contact the institute by phone at (425) 453-1190, by e-mail at mail@slingerland.org, or on the Web at www.slingerland.org.

• **Alphabetic Phonics.** Also derived from Orton-Gillingham, Alphabetic Phonics teaches reading, handwriting, spelling, verbal and written expression, and comprehension by blending visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning. Designed for individual or small-group use by staff in the neurology division of the Texas Scottish Rite Hospital, it incorporates research findings in a broad array of fields, including education, neurology, psychology, and sociology. The program's goal—to develop rapid and accurate word recognition, reading comprehension, and spelling skills—"is achieved through direct and systematic instruction using language and literature-rich lesson plans," according to the Neuhaus Education Center, a nonprofit foundation in Texas that trains teachers in Alphabetic Phonics. For more information, contact the center by phone at (713) 664-7676, by e-mail at info@neuhaus.org, or on the Web at www.neuhaus.org.



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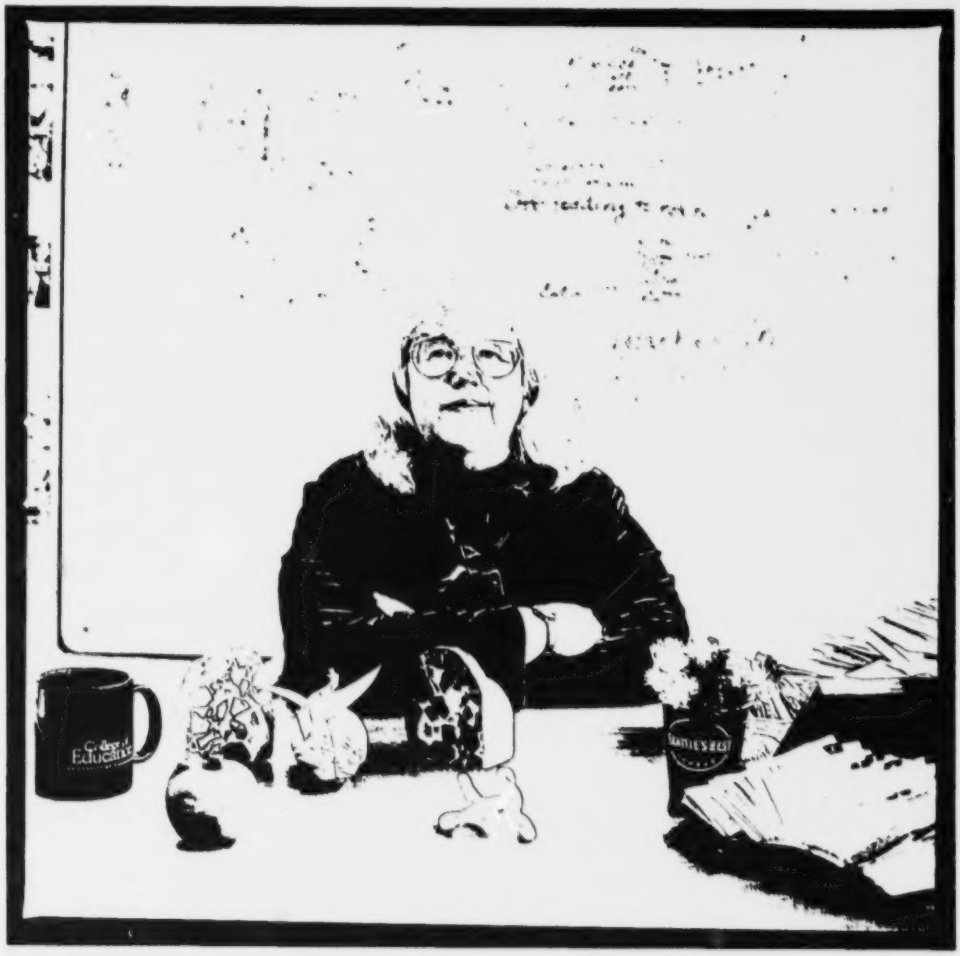
Revealing the Secrets of the Brain

Neuropsychologist Virginia Berninger studies brain images before and after instruction for clues to the mystery of learning disabilities



Grim as they were, the ghettos and barrios of America looked better than the jungles of wartime Vietnam to a lot of university students in the early 1970s. Under a federal program aimed at filling a desperate shortage of inner-city teachers, young men and women could opt to serve their country in the 'hood.

One who answered the call was Virginia Berninger. Just out of college and ready for a stint in the real world before heading back to academia as a graduate student, Berninger spent a year teaching 50 African American and Puerto Rican third-graders in the heart of Philadelphia—no bombs, no napalm, but a jungle just the same.

"We had police escorts because of the gangs in the streets," she says, recalling the rawness of the children's lives with fresh force some three decades later. "I had kids who didn't return from vacation because they were killed or they died of encephalitis, things like that. It was a real eye-opener."

Evenings, she took classes at Temple University, where she delved into the psychology of reading—a natural for a psychology major who'd had a lifelong fascination with how the brain processes the written word and why some children

struggle to learn.

Berninger's graduate education at the Johns Hopkins University was in experimental psychology, focusing on the three areas she thought "held the clue to figuring out what to do with learning disabilities"—cognitive psychology, psychobiology, and psycholinguistics. Her postdoctoral work took her to Boston Children's Hospital, where she taught with a group of physicians from all over the country about child development and learning disabilities and worked in clinics serving children with developmental and learning disorders.

Eventually, she and her husband, Ron—an organic chemist turned biomedical research scientist—came west, after each received a job offer in Seattle on the same day. "Our families thought we were nuts, because both our families have been on the East Coast for generations," she says, and then jokes, "A lot of people felt we went to another country."

Now a widely published professor in the University of Washington College of Education School Psychology Program and director of the UW Multidisciplinary Learning Disabilities Center, Berninger designs and oversees cutting-edge research on the brain-based learning disorders and strategies for addressing learning differences. The center, one of several such centers housed at universities around the nation (including Yale and Georgetown), is engaged in research on brain imaging, as well as genetic clues to learning disabilities. The UW brain imaging team, headed by Todd Richards and Elizabeth Aylward, has discovered, for example, that dyslexic children differ from good readers in brain activation associated with several language tasks, but these differences disappear after instructional intervention. (For more on Berninger's research and writings, see "Why Can't I Read?" beginning on Page 2.)

Sitting in her office among teetering paper towers of research reports and scholarly journals, Berninger shares a sampling of her knowledge and experience with *Northwest Education*.

NORTHWEST EDUCATION: Why is it important for teachers to study the brain?

VIRGINIA BERNINGER: I find that teachers are hungry for information about the brain. Yet, there's so much bogus information out there. It's very easy to be naïve—to not be a critical consumer of what's out there. There are a lot of people who are capitalizing on this gap in teachers' knowledge. It also concerns me because teachers are expected to help kids learn and develop, and the major organ for that is the brain. Yet, they are given no training for this in their teacher education programs. That's one of the reasons we wrote our textbook (Berninger, V.W., and Richards, T.L., *Brain Literacy for Educators and Psychologists*, Academic Press, 2002). Neuroscience has been around for about 150 years, and we're getting to the point where there are certain general principles that are givens—a body of shared knowledge. Not that we fully understand the brain by a long shot. But if you don't understand these principles, you're going to remain a naïve consumer of this information.

NW: If learning disabilities occur in only about 10 percent of the population, as many experts suggest, why do general education teachers need to concern themselves with this?

BERNINGER: We have learned that there's an incredible amount of normal variation in learning processes among the general population. We did a study in a very large school looking at kindergartners and first-graders. We started with intensive, one-and-a-half-hour testing of each child at the end of kindergarten. Then we followed them to the end of first grade, going back five times to test all of these kids on reading and related skills. So I really had a chance to look at this longitudinal unfolding of the process. When we started, the teachers said: "We need to tell you that this is a very homogeneous group. These kids all learn to read. You're not going to find a lot of variation here." Well, surprise, it was just *incredibly* diverse. I don't think the public, the politicians, parents, teachers understand how much diversity they're dealing with inside the minds of learners. I stayed in touch with the psychologist at that school, and she said: "Ginger, you were right on. All the kids you flagged for us in first grade who were at risk because they couldn't do tasks based on phonological awareness—they couldn't segment words into phonemes and they couldn't write their alphabet letters from memory—these are the kids who continued to have difficulties in high school."

> "I find that teachers are hungry for information about the brain."

NW: You have done a lot of investigation into the connection between reading and writing difficulties.

BERNINGER: I couldn't help but notice that the kids with reading problems generally also had writing problems. Writing disabilities are less understood, even, than reading disabilities. One of the first grants I got was looking at individual differences among children in their abilities to write letters, words, sentences,

and texts. The sample populations were local, but they were collected to be representative of the U.S. population in terms of ethnicity and parents' educational levels. I was looking for the early developmental origin of writing problems, instead of waiting until the upper elementary or middle school years after years of chronic failure. We think we found it: It's handwriting and it's spelling. And, more importantly, it's handwriting "automaticity"—how automatically the student can make those letters so they're not drawing them. It needs to be automatic so you're not using valuable mental resources for making the letters, and you have more room to think about what you want to say and how you're going to say it. In the beginning stages of spelling, it's not truly visual. It's a way of representing the sound system of spoken language. So children who have trouble with that sound system, with those phonemes and translating or mapping those phonemes onto letters, are the ones who have the spelling difficulty. We really emphasize that the handwriting lesson is not independent seatwork. It must be teacher led, because part of the secret is that you're constantly naming the letters for the kids. But teaching these systems explicitly is not the prevailing way that writing is taught. Most schools use whole language and journal writing, where there isn't a lot of explicit instruction and attention to transcription. Journal writing doesn't get at the social part—sharing your work—which is often what motivates kids. And journal writing doesn't give them topics. Where a lot of kids have trouble—beyond handwriting and spelling— is planning. So first you need to teach kids how to write the letters, and then you need to give them something to write about—a plan—and let them read it out loud. Maybe other people can't read their handwriting or spelling, but they can still share. We tell them that great authors like to read their work to other people. Sharing is definitely the motivational link for reluctant writers. I think the whole-language approach may have created a lot of writing disabled kids—kids who are curriculum casualties, not biologically based writing casualties.

NW: But curriculum design doesn't hold *all* the answers, does it?

BERNINGER: We knew it wasn't totally curriculum, because let's be honest, there are an awful lot of kids out there, even with whole language, who do pretty well. So our study also looked at writing from a neurodevelopmental point of view: What brain processes were causing the handwriting and the spelling to break down? Although some children are at risk because of biological risk factors—genes, brain wiring—it doesn't mean they can't learn. It's just that for them, it really matters what *kind* of instruction they get. It needs to be explicit. This doesn't mean you have to drill them to death. It means that you have to make it really clear and obvious to them. You have to take all these skills and break them down into their little pieces and help them learn all the processes. Using a lot of statistics—with the able assistance of Robert Abbott, a professor of statistics and chair of educational psychology—we were able to identify which processes were the best predictors of handwriting and which were the best predictors of spelling. From that, we developed a battery of assessment measures that can be used for screening and identifying those kids who are most at risk and for diagnosing persistent writing problems. We spent the next seven years doing instructional interventions to validate what works to fix the kids at risk. We wanted to cast our net widely and help as many kids as possible, so we went into first-, second-, and third-grade classrooms and found all the kids who were low achieving in various writing and reading skills. But we designed interventions based on what we had learned about the neurological processes that might be breaking down.

NW: So schools need to look at curriculum first?

BERNINGER: What we really should be doing when we design intervention plans is to start by assessing the curriculum, not the child. We need to ask, given what we know from research, what are the necessary instructional components that need to be in place? Let's not blame the teachers. Let's not blame the families. Some people still think LD kids are from dysfunctional families and have a motivational problem because they don't produce. That's not the case. These kids don't come from dysfunctional families any more than anyone else. So let's look in the classroom, let's see what's been tried, and see if we can help the school tweak it, add some things, delete some things, modify some things.

NW: How does the teacher know whether her approach is working on an individual basis—whether each child is making sufficient gains?

BERNINGER: It's got to be an integrated assessment-intervention approach. You need to build in daily progress monitoring—a way for the child to get a little sense of progress. You need to quickly get the kids to feel like, "I can do it"—to feel like they're readers and writers—because motivation is such an important part. You need to set goals and monitor progress weekly, monthly, and

twice a year using a variety of modes of assessment—curriculum based, criterion referenced, norm referenced, portfolios. A lot of teachers just aren't comfortable with the assessment role, and they don't do it. That's why they don't know that some kids aren't making it. If a kid sits there smiling or is socially appropriate or says cute things, the teacher just doesn't realize there's a problem.

NW: What strategies have you developed that help ensure that all kinds of learners grasp reading in the early years?

BERNINGER: We have found that kids' word recognition gets better when they work on *both* the alphabetic principle and comprehension—that you really need to teach *all* of it. So we've tried to integrate the best of the skills approach with the best of whole language. From the research, we've learned that you need phonological, orthographic, and morphological awareness to learn to read and spell words. You need to work on vocabulary, morphology, and syntax to develop sentence-level understanding. To develop text discourse, there's text structure and text processing. We know these general principles. But is there more than one way to teach orthographic, phonological, morphological awareness, and text structure? Of course there is. That's where the professionalism of teachers comes in. I don't think each teacher should be a robot following the leader's instructions. But we need to make sure at each grade level—where individual children are developmentally—that the critical component skills are in place in the curriculum. And then let the teacher use her own creativity. I think teachers need a toolbox, a collection of tricks of the trade in their repertoire. If one thing doesn't work, you need to try something else. Underneath it all, you have to understand conceptually why you're doing it and what the goal is.

NW: Is it really possible to blend whole language with direct instruction in sound-letter patterns?

BERNINGER: If I were helping schools evolve, I would have tracks where you cover the same kind of material with all kids in an intellectually engaging way, but some kids get more explicit instruction. In the old days, there were a lot of worksheets—skill-and-drill stuff—that turned people off. But you can make the alphabetic principle explicit without doing drills. But I do think we need to make alphabetic principles explicit to students, and it's not always been happening—not the way that I think a lot of kids need it. Some kids need that explicitness; others can figure it out on their own. I don't think we should be drilling those kids who can figure it out on their own or who got help from their parents in figuring it out.

NW: Have schools in general made progress in working with LD kids?

BERNINGER: In the '70s most teacher education programs had very little formal instruction on how to teach reading—what kinds of things you should do in your classroom. I think that's changed in some places, but it hasn't changed everywhere. I don't want to fault any one group. I just think as a nation, we still have not come to terms with the fact that there are both biologically based and culturally based learning differences. It has nothing to do with skin color; it has to do with what's inside people's heads. We're not adequately preparing teachers in a practical sense for what they can do, day to day, in their classroom to deal with this diversity. □

DOUBLE DOSE

Bethel School District's intensive reading program adds beefed-up instruction for at-risk readers from Day One

By CATHERINE PAGLIN

EUGENE, Oregon—Brandon is a busy and capable kindergartner. One morning before Christmas, he kept right up with his classmates at Clear Lake Elementary as he counted the 67 days of school he's attended so far, recited a poem about the five little Santas, and made a construction-paper wreath. When his work was done, he settled on the floor to play with trucks and blocks.

Brandon also knows quite a few letter sounds. "That one says */b/* and that one says */a/*," he tells a visitor, pointing at the large letter cards hanging over the blackboard. As he speaks, he gets up from the rug. "I have to stand up to do it," he explains. Demonstrating his expertise in the alphabetic principle, it seems, takes Brandon's full concentration. "That one's */r/* and that one says */f/*," he continues. "And that one is */p/*. And */s/*," he announces proudly with a prolonged, snake-like hiss.

Brandon is on target to become a reader. But if he'd been in school five years ago, he might well have been on track for special education instead. That's because he started kindergarten showing clear signs of reading difficulties. An assessment found that he was having trouble with such tasks as identifying letters and recognizing or reproducing the initial sounds in spoken words. Most telling, he was making little or no progress after a few weeks in school. The school's old approach wasn't geared to dealing with reading problems quickly and systematically. A learning disability label and a referral to special ed might have been the outcome for this bright boy.

But luckily for Brandon, an innovative approach adopted by Bethel School District several years ago rapidly intervened with strategies tailored to his needs. The results have been stunning. Today, only 2 percent of kids

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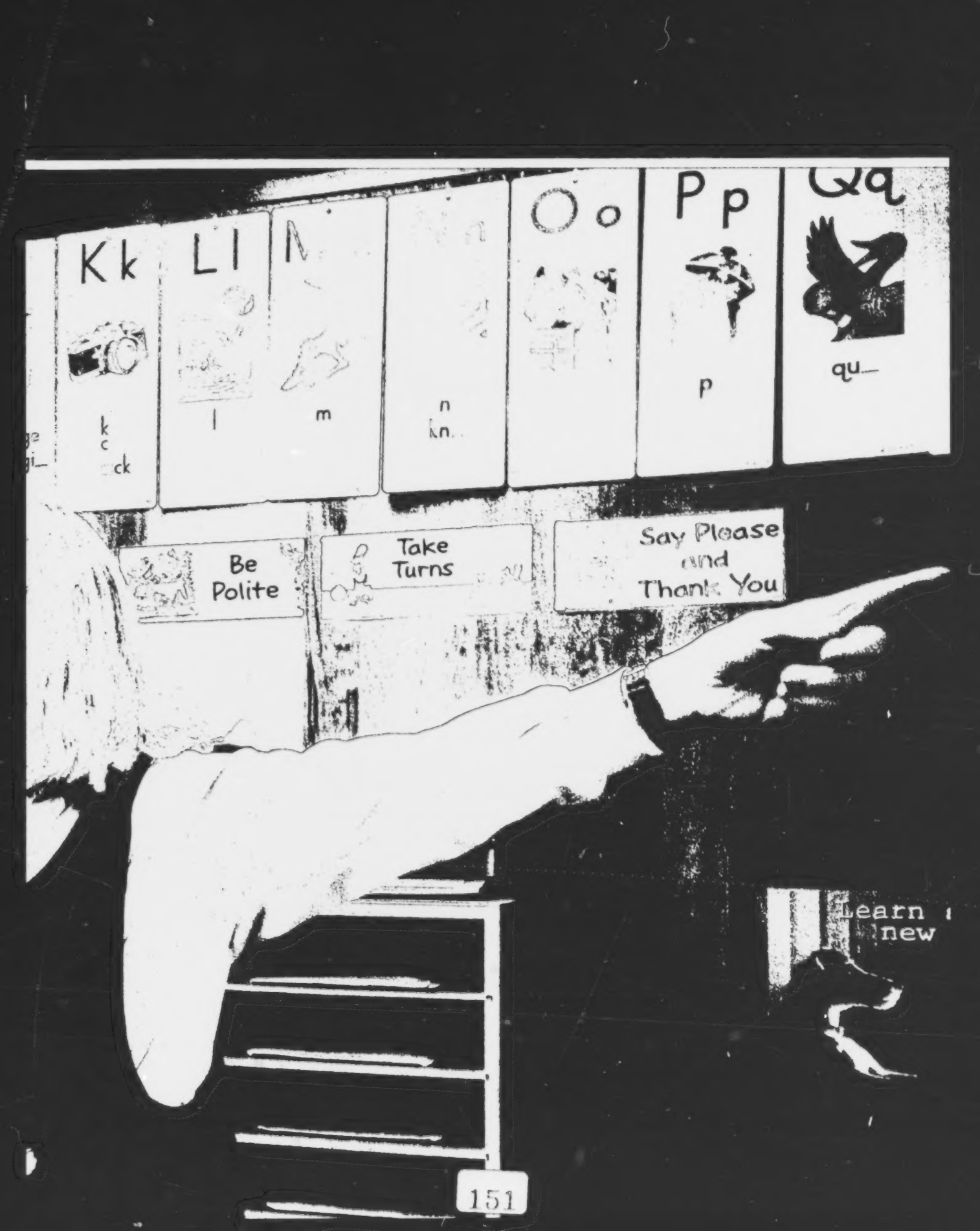
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Be Polite
Take Turns
Say Please and Thank You
Learn new

leave first grade as nonreaders—phenomenal for any school, and especially given the low socioeconomic status and high mobility rates of Bethel students.

Before the initiative, the numbers were discouraging. In those days, 15 percent of kids left first grade unable to read. Second-grade special ed referral rates were soaring—hitting 17 percent at one school in 1996–97. Worried, the district began analyzing its approach to reading. Recalls Carl Cole, special services director, "We were concerned about the high number of kids identified as learning disabled, and when you're talking about kids who are learning disabled, you're almost exclusively talking about kids with reading disabilities."

Looking into the matter, the district found that the problem was not with the assessments and identifications of the referred students. They were accurate. But assessments of kids were not tied to what was happening in the classroom, instructionally. Sometimes the evaluation team referred kids to special ed to make sure students would get instruction of a kind not available in the regular classroom. "When it was discovered that kids were discrepant readers, we didn't use that information to say, 'What are we doing instructionally that's causing this?'" Cole recalls.

What they were doing instructionally was, as at many districts across the country, "a recipe for disaster," says Cole, particularly for a student population in this low-income community where transient hotels and homeless shelters are plentiful. Because the district had a site-based approach—allowing each school to choose its own reading program—there was no consistency from school to school, grade to grade, room to room. Different textbooks were in use across schools, within schools, and even within grade levels at the same school.

Also, the district's half-day kindergarten was mainly a social-readiness program, not an instructional program. Had Brandon entered a Bethel kindergarten back in the old days, he would not have been tested and monitored regularly on indicators of progress toward reading. His exposure to letters and letter sounds would have been incidental, not direct. If he didn't seem to be catching on—if, for instance, he had nothing to contribute when his teacher asked the class to brainstorm for words that start with a *b*—his teacher would have concluded that he was just "not ready for reading."

District administrators became convinced that most kids ID'd as learning disabled are actually "instructionally disabled." So they set out to build a reading program that would be effective for all students. They joined forces with University of Oregon's Institute for Development of Educational Achievement, directed by nationally known reading researchers Drs. Edward Kame'enui and Deborah Simmons. A four-year, $700,000 grant from the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs was committed to the development, implementation, and evaluation of Bethel's reading initiative.

"The amount of support we had was phenomenal," says Cole. Besides bringing in the expertise of Kame'enui [say *ka-may-ah-NEW-ee*] and Simmons, the grant paid for staff development and a new position—reading coordinator.

Today, Bethel's approach to reading is more than an instructional model—it's also a prevention model, designed to head off many learning disabilities at the pass. The model includes:

- Measurable district goals for each grade level
- Regular and frequent assessment and monitoring
- Research-based curricula that involve direct, explicit, and systematic instruction
- Protected time for reading
- Instruction in small groups at each child's skill level
- Leadership role for principals
- Training for all teachers and educational assistants in using the curricula and assessment measures

Research shows that the "wait-and-see" attitude toward reading problems—common at many schools—is a mistake. Instead, Bethel takes an "as-early-as-possible" approach. In the second week of school, a building assessment team (typically, the Title I and special ed teachers, plus educational assistants) tests kindergartners for initial-sound fluency and letter-naming fluency, using a set of indicators and benchmarks developed at the University of Oregon. The DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), which each take about three minutes per student to administer, are reliable predictors of later reading performance, according to research findings. Based on these assessments as well as subsequent teacher observations, students are placed in small groups in one of three categories: "benchmark," which means on track to meet district goals and ultimately state standards; "strategic," meaning progressing but behind; and "intensive," meaning at risk of failing to meet goals, a category that embraces the lowest-performing 20 percent.

By the beginning of October, the at-risk kindergartners are getting an extra 30 minutes of reading instruction. They also get progress moni-

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toring with DIBELS twice a month —twice as often as their classmates. The extra instruction is not a pull-out but an add-on. At Clear Lake, the additional time is sandwiched between morning and afternoon kindergarten. A van collects and delivers the afternoon extended-day kids early, and takes the morning group home half an hour later than their classmates.

The curriculum for this extended kindergarten (playfully named the "Reading Raccoons") is Early Reading Intervention (ERI), developed by Kame'enui and Simmons and field-tested in the Bethel district before being published recently by Scott Foresman. During the half-hour lesson, the instructors—teachers and educational assistants—move almost seamlessly from one activity to the next, hardly wasting a breath. Speaking smoothly and sometimes rhythmically, they deal out and sweep up manipulatives such as letter tiles, erasable white boards, alphabet and picture cards, tracing cards, game boards, pencils, and paper. As they do, they model and test children on very specific phonological skills, for instance, the ability to isolate particular initial and final sounds.

Teacher Jane Sterett's group of five Reading Raccoons is all attention as she passes out yellow plastic letter tiles—clink, clink—*p, t, s, m,* and *l* to each child. In front of each child is a laminated strip printed with a row of three squares. The teacher holds up a picture card.

"This is *cat,*" she says, then asks, "What is this?"

"*Cat,*" they chorus.

Then, following her instructions, the students move their index fingers along the strip, pointing to each square as Sterett slowly says each sound: */k/, /aaa/, /t/.*

"Where is */t/?*" she asks. The students point to the last square. "That's right, */t/* is the last sound in cat. Now find the letter for the sound */t/* and put it in the last square." The plastic tiles clink as each child finds the "t" and places it on the strip.

Each daily lesson offers many chances for children to respond individually and as a group. Though ERI is highly scripted, experienced teachers often fit in even more opportunities for responses, while still delivering the program as intended, says district reading coordinator Rhonda Wolter, who along with Cole is a reader for the U.S. Department of Education's Reading First grant proposals. The 126 lessons take students along a skills continuum—from learning letters and sounds to segmenting and blending phonemes in sequence to reading words and, finally, to reading sentences and storybooks. Each lesson includes writing and spelling activities as well as

PAGES 30–31: First-grade teacher Vivian Ewing leads her class in a lesson on letter sounds.
LEFT: Kindergartners write letters during small-group literacy instruction.
ABOVE: First-graders gesture when Ewing calls out words with the long *i* sound.

activities for phonological awareness and alphabetic understanding.

Another research based curriculum, Open Court is the core reading program at Clear Lake and most of the district's seven elementary schools, where it is used for daily whole-group instruction, K–3. During the small-group instruction that follows, three educational assistants join the teachers for instruction geared to the kids' skill levels. The "strategic" group gets ERI. The "benchmark" group might read decodable or leveled books. And the "intensive" group gets a "double dose" of reading, reinforcing the same concepts they encountered in ERI, but with different materials.

The extra instruction for at-risk readers continues through the primary grades. "Part of what has been really successful with our model is that for kids who need interventions like this, we always try to make it *in addition to* the regular program," says curriculum director Drew Braun. "In the past, it was 'instead of.' For example, when you broke into reading groups, if you were Title I you went to Title I. Now Title I and other services are a second dose for those kids—not instead of, because kids are not going to get caught up unless we give them extra."

Another "extra" is the district's five-week summer school for students who are not meeting benchmarks or are in danger of losing ground over the break. "They're kids that we're not sure how much support they're going to get over the summer, whether anybody's going to get them to the library, so we give them the opportunity to continue practicing their skills," says Wolter.

The district's commitment to reading is paying off. For children who have been in the Bethel reading program since kindergarten, second-grade special education referrals are now between 4 and 6 percent, even though students are actually entering school with lower prereading skills than before.

"I think one kind of kid we catch is a kid who has trouble paying attention," says Wolter. "We have a lot of those kinds of kids. In a big group, they start losing out on what's going on. By doing our small groups, we've been able to capture those kids, keep them in a structured setting, and work with them."

Some kids, despite the research-based curricula, the twice-monthly assessment, and the early and extra intervention, still don't make progress. In that case, says Wolter, "a whole series of checks" happens. "Has the student been absent a lot, does the student have health problems, has their vision been checked, their hearing?" Wolter says. "Maybe it's in the instruction. Maybe the instructor's been shaving off five minutes because the kids have been coming in late. Are they in a group too large? Is the program being used with fidelity?"

Going down this checklist usually roots out the problem. Sometimes, it's found in surprising places —literally. Last year, a doctor turned up foreign objects —a bead and a twisted piece of aluminum foil—in the ears of a boy whose progress in extended kindergarten had stalled.

FLIP OF A SWITCH

The reading initiative has wrought changes on a lot of levels. At the district level, it broke down a dividing line between regular and special education. These days, Cole—the special ed expert—might run a general curriculum meeting, while Braun —the generalist—might facilitate a special ed meeting. "It's just a continuum," says Braun. "We've taken a lot of the bags of tricks of special education and put them in the regular classroom because they work really well."

Kindergarten teachers were resistant at first to the new instructional methods and assessments when the program began to phase in spring of 1999.

"It was very, very difficult—I got my phone unlisted," Cole jokes.

Clear Lake Principal Betsy Fernandez, too, recalls some tension. "Some of the teachers in my building were pretty outspoken in the questions that they asked—'What about the pressure that's being put on kids academically? What about the whole developmental approach to teaching kindergarten?'" she says. "They were tough questions. And now my kindergarten teachers are some of the most dedicated to the program, and the results they're getting are really good."

The change, she says, came when teachers began seeing the hard data after the first half-year. "It was like the flip of a switch," she remarks.

Kindergarten teacher Elizabeth Radke notes that "having more intentional instruction and more direct instruction to their levels was helping" the strugglers.

The other thing that changed kindergarten teachers' minds, besides the data, was the depth of the district's investment in the program. "We couldn't do it without all the support," says kindergarten teacher Linda Tindal. "It wouldn't work if I had to try to run four reading groups by myself. But our district is very committed to it, and it's wonderful."

With students entering first grade more prepared, they catch on more quickly. To accommodate those stronger learners, teachers are making adjustments. Reading coordinator Wolter had to scramble for appropriate reading materials when the first wave of better-prepared stu-

First-graders play a game that gives them practice with sight words.

dents hit first grade.

"Most of the kids come in, if they've been here, knowing the majority of their letter names and sounds," says first-grade teacher Vivian Ewing. "They're really ready to take off with the reading. It's amazing to see, because it used to be that out of a class this size, a third of them knew all the letter names and sounds, a third of them knew about 10, and a third of them hadn't had any experience or they'd had experience but it wasn't consistent enough."

Wolter has seen the same effects. "Even Title I classrooms don't have as many kids in them as they used to," she says. "And the kids are doing higher skills"—not the typical Title I work. Another outcome, she says, is that many Title I first-graders are new kids moving in who haven't had an academic kindergarten. "So," she says, "we need to start all over with them."

A major impact of the program has been in special education classrooms. "They used to get instructionally disabled kids," says Cole. "You'd put good, sound, instructional programs in front of those kids and they'd start moving along. Now they have the really difficult kids."

Because of the reading project, most kids in special ed are truly learning disabled, agrees Clear Lake's special education teacher Linda Duke. "They're really challenging." Still, Duke likes the new continuity between special and regular education. For instance, she uses the same DIBELS system of progress monitoring that the regular teachers use, just more frequently. Sometimes teachers are using the same direct instruction programs with their low readers as she does in the resource room. And when she mainstreams a child, various interventions, such as an oral reading fluency lab, are available in the regular program, allowing the child to keep working on key reading skills.

"The teachers are working together and the whole system is so fluid that we can move kids in and out of programs," she says.

Meanwhile, to determine how best to help the kids who are not responding adequately to the reading interventions, the district is involved in federally funded research studies with the University of Oregon.

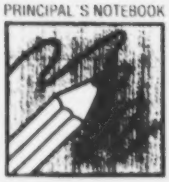
"I CAN DO IT"

The most dramatic changes in Bethel are in student performance. The statistics tell part of the story. Compare, for example, the first-grade oral reading fluency scores of kids who move to the district in the fall of first grade with scores of kids who enter in the fall of kindergarten. (Oral reading fluency—the number of words a student can read correctly in one minute—is a reliable predictor of how well a student will do on comprehension tests, such as the Oregon State Assessment.) At the beginning of first grade, there's a significant difference between the groups, says Braun. By spring, the new kids have not caught up. They are still 10 words behind in oral reading fluency. For kids who enter the district in second grade, the end-of-year difference is 22 words per minute.

"Kids who have been here are reading 25 percent faster than kids who came in at the beginning of second grade," Braun reports. Late-entering students, in fact, are Bethel's next challenge, particularly with its high mobility rate. Between the beginning of kindergarten and the beginning of first grade, the district loses about 22 percent of its original kindergarten class and gains about 20 percent in new students in first grade.

Scores and statistics, however, don't tell the whole story. Changes have shown up, too, in student behavior. "Previously, kids were starting to misbehave because they were having difficulty with skills," says Wolter. "By putting them in a small group, by getting them right where their skill level is, we alleviate some of those problems. They start feeling good about themselves, and they don't have to act out."

Clearly, Brandon is one child who feels confident in his abilities. He likes to tell about the letters he's learned and show off how fast he can spell his name. "There's a lot of stuff I do in Reading Raccoons," he says. "We do Writer's Warm-Up, and that's hard. But," he reports with pride, "I can still do it." □



A PLACE OF CALM

By Richard Erdrich

KETCHIKAN, ALASKA—Most seventh-graders make a quick adjustment from the self-contained classroom of elementary school to the hectic pace of middle school. They move from class to class, subject to subject, with relative ease. But for some students, the exciting newness of middle school fades into confusion as they travel from one room to the next every 46 minutes—bumping shoulders with 400 other students surging through the hallways, adjusting to a new teacher and a new group of classmates every period. Everything becomes blurred, distracting. Finally, as the D's and F's pile up, many of these students drop out in discouragement.

Staff members here at Schoenbar Middle School were all too aware that academic failure loomed large for many students who entered middle school unprepared to function in a multiperiod, multiclassroom environment. We were retaining an average of six to eight students a year at both the seventh and eighth grades—far more than we were willing to accept.

In search of solutions, we set out to identify traits that are congruent among these students. They:

- Lag behind grade level by one to two years
- Frequently fail classes in basic subjects
- Struggle to complete work
- Have poor organizational skills, often failing to turn in work that they *have* completed
- Have poor attendance and frequent tardies
- Are likely to have been retained in an earlier grade

At about the same time, the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, in cooperation with community organizations, began working with school districts to combat FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder). After a two-day inservice on FASD, the teachers, counselor, and I were struck by the similar profiles of our struggling students and FASD children. Many kids diagnosed with FASD are overlooked and untreated. Often identified as "conduct disordered," these kids occasionally are picked up under the umbrella of special education, but they don't have a special designation under federal disability laws requiring appropriate accommodations.

We learned that students with FASD have a greater need for routine and structure in their educational experience than other children. But we were very aware of the flip side of the coin: That we need to make our classes active and engaging to hold students' interest and attention. As teachers, we were being pulled in two directions. While part of the class needed stimulation, the other part of the class was being pushed over the edge because we were overlooking the need for quiet and calm—tough to achieve with 32 middle schoolers.

A SEPARATE PEACE. We set about to design an alternate environment for these students who so clearly learn differently from others. We talked to local agencies—Gateway Center for Human Services and Ketchikan Indian Corporation—that might partner with us, and sought their input specifically regarding how students with FASD learn. We also got inservice training on techniques geared for this population.

With those techniques as a focal point, we decided on a home-room model for our FASD kids and others with similar learning problems, some with identified learning disabilities. They would spend three periods in a core classroom for reading, writing, math, and social studies. They would then transition to other subjects, such as PE, shop, music, and life skills. Science, too, would be a separate class because of required lab activities. But the students would all move to science class together. Instruction in classroom skills and organization—a particular challenge for this group of kids—would be an important component of the curriculum.

Based on research findings on small schools and middle schools that show the importance of relationship-building for adolescents, this program would give students a chance to bond with one academic teacher instead of trying to forge a relationship with three separate subject-area teachers. And transitions from subject to subject would be accomplished without frequent four-minute dips into hectic hallways and the constant struggle to be in the right place at the right time.

Subject matter would not be watered down: In keeping with district curriculum and state standards, activities would be challenging and goals would be high, yet reachable. The students would still have a top-quality educational experience designed and delivered in sync with the unique needs of this population.

To identify students for the program, a referral form was developed to serve as a rubric. Staff, students, and parents were asked to rate students in 10 areas, including attendance, organizational skills, work habits, learning rate, ability to follow directions, social skills, distractibility, and tardiness. Two key questions were also asked: Was the student more than one year below grade level? Was the child likely to fail academic classes without the assistance of the program?

SECURITY BLANKET. The program that emerged—Students Taking Academics Responsibly (S.T.A.R.)—provides a self-contained classroom for up to 20 students with a full-time teacher and instructional aide. The atmosphere in class is comfy and nurturing—kids sprawl on the carpet or plop into beanbag chairs to work or listen.

Principal Richard Erdrich
Schoenbar Middle School

It wasn't long before math scores started to rise. Students began reading—and enjoying it. Self-esteem was up. One eighth-grader with a "Linus syndrome"—he needs to be wrapped in a blanket to feel safe—had a place where he could cocoon without ridicule. Of last year's original group of 20 seventh-graders—who got only 12 weeks in the program because it didn't get off the ground until spring—15 moved to the eighth-grade program. This year's group should do even better after a full year in the program.

The program has been partially funded by a FASD grant from the state education department. To be sustainable, however, it will need financial support from other outside agencies. Our hope is to eventually provide training to other educators, parents, and paraprofessionals who want to implement a similar program for their students.

If we as educators are to be successful with a student population with diverse educational, emotional, and physical backgrounds, we must make changes in our delivery. It took many months of thinking outside the box to come up with a program geared to students who can't cope with the stresses of a traditional school environment. We believe this program sheds a new and promising light on serving students with learning disabilities.

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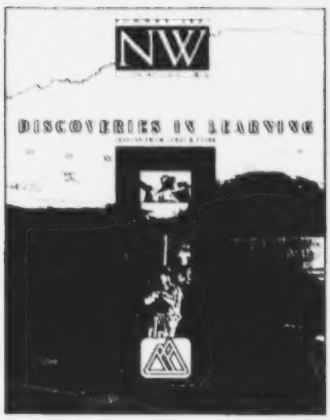

ON THE COVER:
Montana's Square Butte with insets of the statue of Sacagawea with child in Portland's Washington Park, yucca flowers from the Missouri Breaks, and portrait of Montana teacher Charlie Brown as Corpsman "Joseph Fields" by Denise Jarrett Weeks. Inset of sketches from one of the Corps of Discovery journals is courtesy of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, Great Falls, Montana.

Quotations of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark that appear throughout the magazine are from the 13-volume *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* edited by Gary E. Moulton and published by University of Nebraska Press in 1983, as well as the online version of the same title (http://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/).

Discoveries in Learning
Lessons From Lewis & Clark

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DEPARTMENTS

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The stories of the Lewis and Clark expedition draw many of us in as inexorably as the Corps of Discovery paddled and pulled its canoes across the continent.

For me, the first good tug was reading Stephen Ambrose's book, *Undaunted Courage*, which spun Lewis and Clark's journal entries into a gripping narrative. Not at all a history buff, I bought the book because newspaper reviews had made Ambrose's storytelling sound irresistible. It was. I read it at bus stops and lunch breaks. I read it in the evenings; in the morning with my coffee. I read passages to my husband: "Honey, listen to this: 'The men's labor was...such that each private ate as much as nine or ten pounds of meat per day.' Can you believe that?!"

The high adventures the Corpsmen described in their journals—capsizing boats, attacking grizzly bears, thrilling encounters with Native people—are page-turners, but it is the small detail that brings the humanity of the trek to me most vividly: their meals, their stomach upsets, Lewis's careful ministration of Sacagawea's "female trouble," the power of an old Nez Perce woman to reassure her tribe's men that Lewis's small band was peaceful.

The images stayed in my mind long after I'd finished Ambrose's book.

"How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book?"

The question was Nathaniel Hawthorne's, says historian James P. Ronda in his classic, *Lewis & Clark Among the Indians*. For Ronda, a book set him onto a new course of scholarship. After reading *Passage Through the Garden: Lewis and Clark and the Image of the American Northwest* by John L. Allen, he focused his research on the roles Native people played in the expedition. "Books make a difference; reading changes lives," Ronda says.

While the course of my life didn't change, I did begin to cross paths with others who were also drawn to this story. Later, joining the editorial team of *Northwest Education*, I "inherited" this issue of the magazine—with its Lewis and Clark theme—from former editor Suzie Boss. Though moving on to a new job, she was easily persuaded to write the lead feature story on Page 8. I met with NWREL's Patricia Nida, who helps teachers integrate expedition stories into classroom learning, and she told me about the rediscovery of 100-year-old student portfolios that commemorated the centennial of the expedition. Nida has written about these treasures on Page 36.

Then I fell in step with Larry McClure. He's education liaison for the National Council of the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial, a member of the Oregon Chapter of the Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, and recently retired from NWREL. Many of the story ideas in this issue of *Northwest Education* are his; two of them he wrote. It seems just about anywhere along the trail to Lewis and Clark, you'll find McClure's footprints: in classrooms, at workshops, and trailside.

The book that started it all for McClure was *Lewis & Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery: An Illustrated History* by Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan.

"I started writing in the margins about all of the things we teach in school that fit with this story," he says. Think of President Thomas Jefferson's 16-page instructions to Meriwether Lewis as today's education standards. The math, science, writing, and social skills the Corps members needed for the success of the mission aren't dissimilar to the skills kids need today to succeed in life. Think of the teamwork and leadership. The cultural diplomacy and understanding.

"To me, you can take just any part of the story and make it leap back into the curriculum," says McClure. "It's reality-based learning." And what makes the story of the expedition most real are the journals, those books that changed the course of history and, 200 years later, are still changing lives.

—Denise Jarrett Weeks
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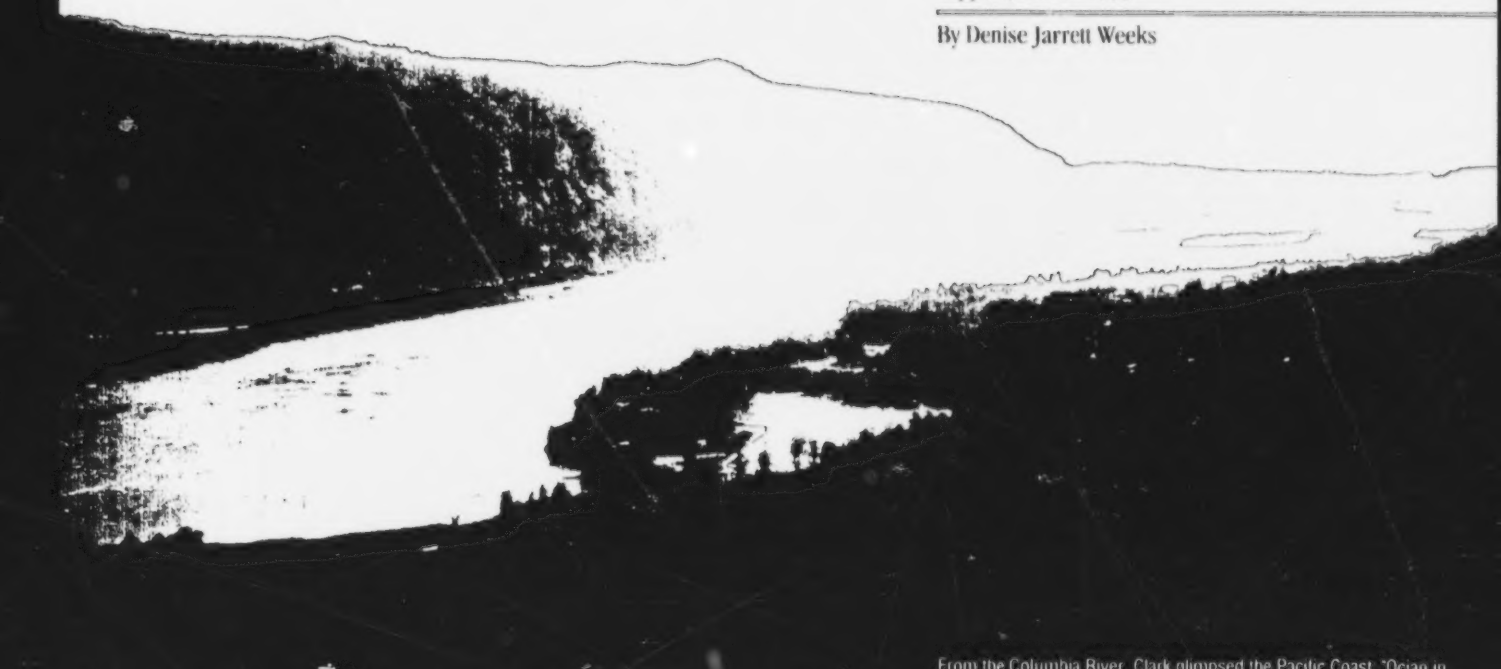
HISTORICAL INQUIRY: CHARTING JOURNEYS OF LEARNING

"History educates in the deepest sense . . . teaching us those virtues once reserved for theology—the virtue of humility in the face of limits to our knowledge and the virtue of awe in the face of the expanse of human history."

—Sam Wineberg, "Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts," *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 1999

By Denise Jarrett Weeks



From the Columbia River, Clark glimpsed the Pacific Coast. "Ocian in view! O! the joy," he later wrote. Photo courtesy of Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, Great Falls, Montana.

A "literary expedition" is how President Thomas Jefferson envisioned Meriwether Lewis and William Clark's mission, writes James P. Ronda in his classic *Lewis & Clark Among the Indians.*

"Lewis and Clark were to gather material for … the empire of the mind, the kingdom of knowledge," he writes. "Jefferson wanted the expedition to make a lasting contribution toward the scientific understanding of North America."

Guided by President Jefferson's list of questions about all manner of phenomena they would likely encounter, the captains prepared to investigate the indigenous people, plants, wildlife, and weather of the regions they would be passing through.

They charted their own ethnographic and scientific course, gathering data and interviewing primary sources of information: Indians, trappers, and traders. They used the most advanced technology of the day. They consulted scientific literature—lugging a small but precious library with them every step of the trek. And through it all, they wrote and wrote.

To read the journals and jottings of the diarists in the Corps of Discovery is to be pulled into the gale of time, to the rivers and their banks of 200 years ago. Their writing is descriptive, immediate, often humorous, and alive with human feeling.

The journals of Lewis, Clark, and Corps members Charles Floyd, Patrick Gass, John Ordway, and Joseph Whitehouse invite students of history to "discover" the past by doing historical inquiry as historians do.

Across the country, teachers and students are taking the opportunity of the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition, 2003–2006, to rediscover their nation's early history and the changes that have occurred during the past 200 years. Through historical inquiry they are learning about the events of the Lewis and Clark expedition and the consequences of it for Native people, the environment, and westward expansion of the new nation.

HISTORICAL INQUIRY

The diverse stories surrounding the history of the Lewis and Clark expedition, and the ever-increasing availability of primary source documents on the Internet, create an exciting catalyst for change in the way history is taught, some say. And none too soon.

Historian Ira Berlin states bluntly in an essay for the Organization of American Historians (www.oah.org/pubs/nl/2002aug/berlin.html) that the nation is experiencing "a deep crisis in history education."

Student performance on the U.S. history portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 1988, 1994, and 2001 has been consistently poor. On the latest NAEP, more than a third of fourth- and eighth-graders, and *nearly 60 percent* of 12th-graders, didn't even achieve Basic, the lowest level ranked.

The NAEP results come after at least a decade of vigorous debate and research about how history should be taught in the schools and what content should be included in the curriculum. In 1987, the Bradley Commission on History in the Schools spurred a reform movement in history education. At the same time, an increasing number of researchers in diverse fields—history, education, psychology—were beginning to study the teaching and learning of history. In 1992, the National Council for History Standards was established, and after rancorous dispute about how best to represent the nation's history, voluntary national history standards were released.

Yet, none of these developments has addressed a persistent problem: a great number of teachers teaching history when they haven't formally studied history themselves. Too many are struggling to cover simply what's in the textbook and are unable to "bring history alive" for students.

Indeed, students by and large think history involves memorizing a textbook's facts about people and events that have no relevance to their lives. Yet, historical inquiry, as it's practiced in the profession, is anything but that. It is

rather "an act that engages the heart," says researcher Sam Wineberg in "Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts" *(Phi Delta Kappan,* March 1999).

To teach history well—to help kids see the "fun" and the meaningfulness in it—you have to ***know*** history well, says Diane Ravitch, former U.S. assistant secretary of education who was a key player in the development of the national history standards.

"It seems a truism that students will not learn much history unless their teachers know it," Ravitch writes in *Who Prepares Our History Teachers? Who Should Prepare Our History Teachers?,* a 1997 paper published by the National Council for History Education (http://63.70.163.70/nche/RavitchSpeech.html). "It should be self-evident that those who teach history should themselves have studied history."

But Ravitch points to a 1996 report by the National Center for Education Statistics that showed "over half of all public school students enrolled in history or world civilization classes in grades 7–12 … were taught by teachers who did not have at least a minor in history."

With so many teachers teaching history without even a minor in the subject, it's no wonder, says Ravitch, they tend to lean heavily on the textbook and are "unlikely to raise questions or pose issues or develop activities that give the spark of life to the words in the textbook."

A WORLD OF DRAMA

As far back as the Bradley Commission, historians and history educators have been saying that "students should enter 'into a world of drama—suspending [their] knowledge of the ending in order to gain a sense of another era—a sense of empathy that allows the student to see through the eyes of the people who were there,'" says Wineberg.

Wineberg has worked with Suzanne M. Wilson to study the link between teachers' content knowledge of history and students' achievement in history. Their findings agree with the results of other studies that indicate that teachers with greater historical knowledge are better teachers of history. Yet, Wilson cautions in "Research on History Teaching," a chapter in ***Handbook of Research on Teaching*** (2001), that the link between "good" teaching and student achievement is yet to be firmly established.

If Ravitch, Wilson, and Wineberg are right, however, as teachers' knowledge of history grows, their overreliance on textbooks should diminish.

"They are peculiar things, textbooks," says Janet Bixby, assistant professor in the Graduate School of Education at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon. She and others from the college are organizing a series of institutes and many other professional development opportunities for teachers on teaching the history of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

"Historians don't read textbooks. Most of us read primary historical accounts and weigh and analyze them ourselves." Students should have plenty of opportunities to study history in the same way, she says, because "textbooks don't invite the student to create questions."

Textbooks effectively shut down historical inquiry, says Wineberg. While historians cite documentary evidence relevant to their findings; disclose opposing views; and reveal their own judgment, emphases, and uncertainties, textbooks do none of this, he says. Rather, they present history as a singular and incontrovertible story. And this discourages students from questioning and challenging the content, posing and testing their own theories, and extending their learning beyond the textbook.

Questions "are the tools of creation," he says. Questions "dwell in the gap between [one's] present knowledge and the circumstances of the past." Wineberg uses a wonderful phrase to describe those who are adept at historical inquiry; they are "expert at cultivating puzzlement," he says.

But there's another obstacle to creating "puzzlement" in

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the classroom, says Bixby. "Teachers are under terrible pressure to cover a broad range of topics. But coverage is antithetical to deep historical inquiry in which you ask your own questions and come up with theories to pursue."

Researchers Virginia Causey and Beverly Armento say, "A more indepth approach would allow for more interdisciplinary content and encourage the development of more critical thinking skills as students grow to understand the complex causes of events."

In their chapter "Strategies for Increasing Achievement in History" in the 2001 book *More Strategies for Educating Everybody's Children*, they write: "An indepth approach would also facilitate the use of primary source documents and the exploration of social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of events and issues."

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Lewis & Clark College has moved to the forefront of scholarship about the Lewis and Clark expedition with the acquisition of several major collections of primary documents related to the Corps of Discovery, the release of an important new book for scholars, and the marshaling of resources and professional development opportunities for K–12 teachers (www.thejourneycontinues.org/).

The college has partnered with the Oregon Council for the Humanities to provide a series of annual institutes and other activities for teachers during the Lewis and Clark bicentennial. Teachers will be engaged in the kind of historical inquiry that historians do: reading primary sources, interviewing people with specialized knowledge, doing fieldwork, evaluating the context of historical documents, consulting multiple sources to gain deeper understanding of historical events and people, communicating their findings to colleagues, and fostering a professional community.

Planners hope that these experiences will inspire teachers and better equip them to engage their own students in such historical inquiry. It would mark a big shift in the way students usually learn history, but Jane Hunter, chair of the college's History Department, believes even young students are capable of historical inquiry.

"History lends itself to hands-on experimental and experiential investigations," she says. "Students can be encouraged to pose the questions, encouraged to hazard a guess, and then sent off to available sources to attempt to confirm or correct their hypotheses."

The Lewis and Clark journals offer particularly rich opportunities for such historical investigations, she says. "An interesting topic is to get students to figure out what we learn about Sacagawea from the journals themselves and to compare it with some of the popularizations of that story," she says. It's a project that her first-year college students have done to good effect.

"The modern version of the Sacagawea story actually dates from the Lewis & Clark Exposition in Portland in the early 20th century when supporters of women's suffrage saw in her a figure they could use to help celebrate women in the Lewis and Clark story," she says.

And the historic places along the Lewis and Clark trail also create wonderful opportunities for experiential learning. Causey and Armento urge teachers to use the community as an historical resource, saying, "The local community provides opportunities for field experiences that use historic places to bring history alive."

"Places have powerful stories to tell," writes Marilyn Harper in her paper, *Including Historic Places in the Social Studies Curriculum*, for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Social Studies/Social Sciences, October 1997 (www.ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed415178.html). Harper is an historian at the National Register of Historic Places of the National Park Service.

"These places provide physical evidence of how broad currents of history affect even small communities. Supplemented with primary or secondary written and visual materials, they also teach such skills as observation, working with maps, interpreting visual evidence, evaluating bias, analysis, comparison and contrast, and problem solving."

THE MANY STORIES OF HISTORY

"At a certain level writing is an act of rescue," says Ronda. "Historians rescue and restore lost voices. The Lewis and Clark journals make that kind of rescue and restoration possible." But he cautions: "What has so often been recounted in terms of high adventure, national triumph, and male courage needs to be told again as a complex human story."

While the story of Sacagawea has been romanticized to mythic proportions, much else about Native people's contributions to the Lewis and Clark expedition as well as their history, culture, and influence in human development on this continent has been obscured.

It is here that primary historical sources can open more accurate portals to the past.

"Again and again Corps of Discovery journal keepers recorded what Native people told them about everything from plants and animals to geography and relations with tribal neighbors. . . . It is those voices that give depth and richness to the Lewis and Clark story," says Ronda. "Most who write about the expedition now acknowledge that Native people were at the heart of the enterprise. Without those Indian voices and views the story is at best only half told."

Historian Stephen Dow Beckham wrote the essays for and edited *The Literature of the Lewis & Clark Expedition: A Bibliography and Essays,* a beautifully bound book about the library's special collection at Lewis & Clark College. He believes that students need to learn about all the important stories of history, not just the glorified version of the making of the nation.

"Euro-American settlement of the American West is usually presented as a great success story" of transforming the "wilderness," he says. "While it is true that these activities contributed to the building of a national economy and have afforded prosperity, they were achieved with costs. Students need to weigh the costs with the benefits. The responsibilities of teachers today are to try to have students see the larger context and the consequences of what has happened, not just the successful outcomes. Knowing the 'underside' of history may help the succeeding generation to cope better with the challenges and problems that confront society."

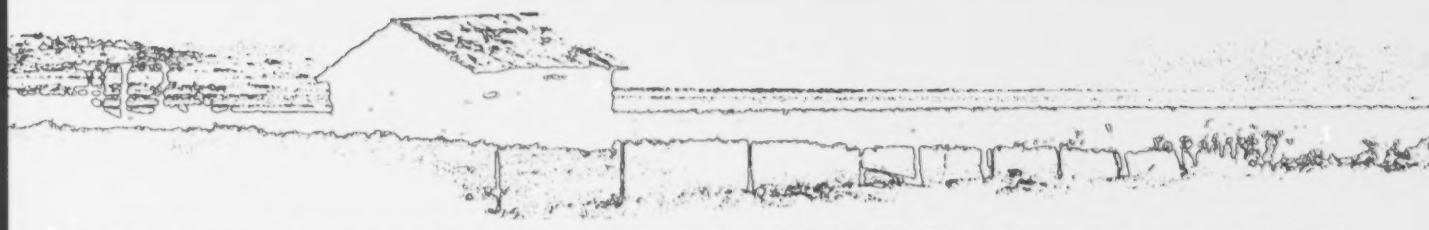
Indeed, Bobbie Connor, co-chair of the Circle of Tribal Advisors for the National Council for the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial and director of the Tamástslikt Cultural Institute in Pendleton, Oregon, says flatly, "There is little that is celebratory about the expedition from Native perspectives."

Speaking to a group of teachers assembled by videoconference for the first Lewis & Clark Weekly Showcase for Teachers presented by the Oregon Public Education Network and partners, including the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (www.open.k12.or.us/oregon/lch/lcb03d.html), Connor continues: "It is in fact the case that the Lewis and Clark expedition is the harbinger of all adverse change that will come subsequent to the mapping and charting of our homelands."

She urges teachers to find alternative sources of information, apart from textbooks and popular narratives, to learn more about "the indigenous people who inhabited these homelands as homes rather than as the uncharted wilderness of Thomas Jefferson's imagination."

A good place to start, she says, is by exploring Native peoples' "first-contact stories." Native oral histories include stories of ancestors' first encounters with white people in general, not just Lewis and Clark. "It's important to start there," says Connor, "because we didn't all meet our first white person at the same time. We weren't standing on the banks of the river waiting for the explorers to arrive so that we could be 'discovered.'"

In fact, Ronda says, "Just as Lewis and Clark explored the lives and cultures of Native people, so too did Indians explore Jefferson's travelers and the things they carried with them. . . . What happened from the Missouri to the Columbia was mutual discovery, shared moments of exploration encounter."



"EXCITING, INTERESTING, AND ENGAGING"

Ira Berlin and other historians and history educators see cause for optimism in a major initiative ushered into the national spotlight by senior Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia: the Teaching American History Grants Program.

The "Byrd grants," writes Berlin are "the single largest public investment in history education," which may very well help to revolutionize the way history is taught in the schools. In just two years, the program has infused $250 million into projects aimed at building teachers' historical knowledge and teaching skill.

In 2001, Byrd's Teaching American History Grants Program was launched as part of President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) education agenda. The NCLB law requires states to establish history standards and tests for all three levels of schooling—elementary, middle, and high school—and ensure that teachers who teach history be credentialed in the subject by the end of the 2005–2006 school year. It also places great emphasis on evidence-based practices and accountability.

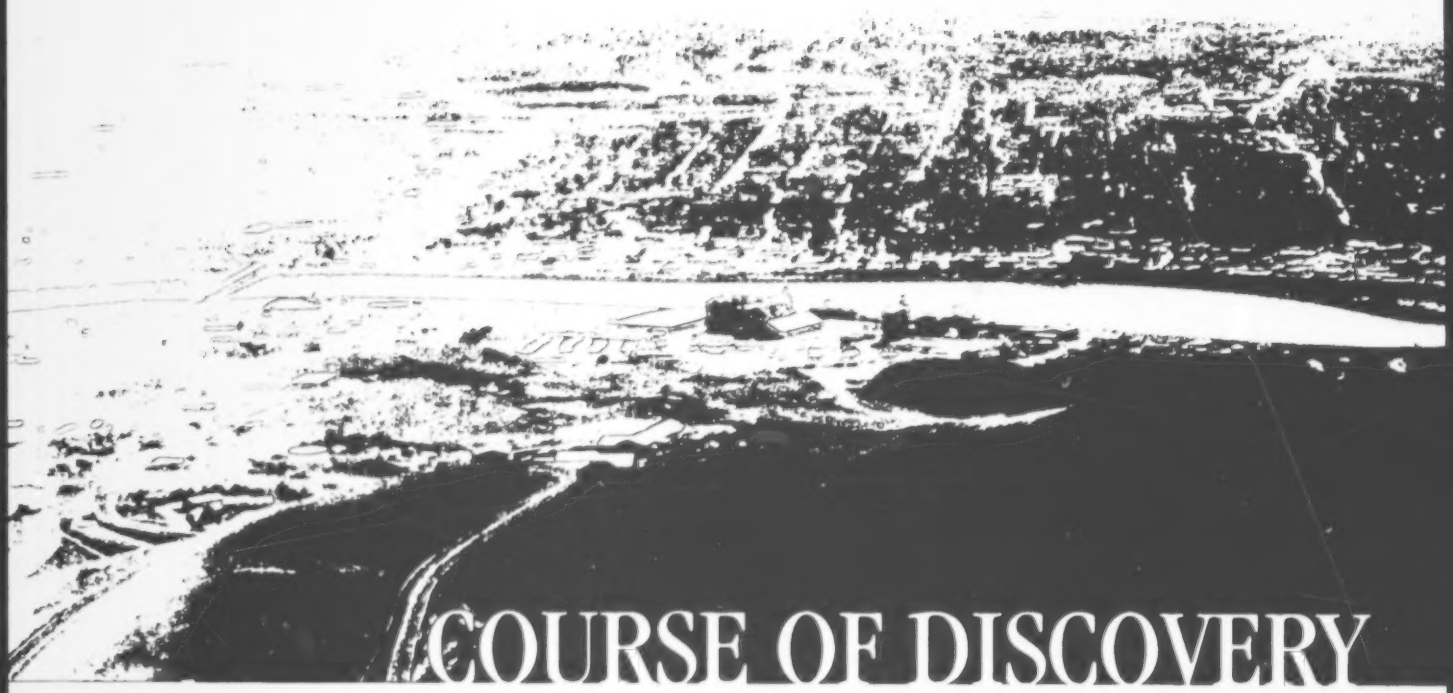
These principles are also pillars of Byrd's new program, but at its core is Byrd's abiding belief that history should be taught as its own subject, apart from social studies.

"By helping teachers to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of American history as a separate subject matter within the core curriculum, these programs will improve instruction and raise student achievement," a request for proposals states.

With some eloquence, it goes on: "Students who know and appreciate the great ideas of American history are more likely to understand and exercise their civic rights and responsibilities. Their understanding of traditional American history will be enhanced if teachers make the study of history more *exciting, interesting, and engaging"* (emphasis added).

The clear message is that history teaching should not only challenge students to learn traditional content about their country's great events and people, but make the learning of it untraditionally engaging, alive, and meaningful—in a word: fun.

In this issue of *Northwest Education,* you'll read about teachers and students who are engaged in just such history learning. Whether designing model keelboats like those used by the Corps of Discovery on the Missouri River or using ground-penetrating radar to find unmarked graves in an old pioneer cemetery, students and their teachers are rediscovering their communities' and nation's history by thinking and pursuing the adventure of learning like historians. □



COURSE OF DISCOVERY

Educators living along the route traveled by Lewis and Clark infuse their teaching with modern tools for exploration.

Story and photos by Suzie Boss

LEWISTON AND KAMIAH, Idaho—Sometime this summer, if all goes according to plan, members of Congress will sit down with a troop of veteran explorers and hear about the discoveries made along a route that cuts across North America, bound for the future. "We will be reporting back to the Congress on the success of our mission," explains Robert Kearney, one of the leaders of the expedition.

If this scenario sounds a bit familiar, it's no accident. Two centuries ago, Lewis and Clark reported back to Congress about the success of their mission. This time around, the explorers are all educators. Their mission, Kearney explains, "has been to infuse technology into K–12 education." And they have much to report.

The Lewis and Clark Rediscovery Project involves 54 teachers from eight states spread along the route traveled by the Corps of Discovery. Based at the University of Idaho with the Potlatch School District serving as fiscal agent, the project is one of 100 Technology Innovation Challenge Grants funded by Congress. Five-year funding of more than $7 million has resulted in extensive professional development and the creation of new online resources to help teachers harness technology to enhance learning. The Rediscovery Project also uses the epic story of Lewis and Clark as a theme for connecting communities and bringing a sense of adventure to the act of learning.

Although the Rediscovery Project was launched at the dawn of the 21st century, participants are still heeding the call issued by President Jefferson 200 years earlier. "Learn all you can" were Jefferson's parting words to the original Corps of Discovery. His message continues to inspire today's educational explorers.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Kearney, former chair of the physics department at the University of

Surviving the crossing of the Bitterroot Mountains, the Corps happily accepted food from the Nez Perces before proceeding on to the Snake River.

Idaho, was toying with the idea of retirement when the chance to lead the Rediscovery Project came along.

"My wife tells me I've failed at retirement," he says, sitting in an office piled high with computers, digital cameras, and other gear that will wind up in classrooms across the country.

After a lifetime spent in Idaho, Kearney was familiar with the broad strokes of the Lewis and Clark story. You can't help but bump into reminders of their trek in this state, which has embraced Lewis and Clark history as a way to promote modern-day tourism. Highways are dotted with roadside markers showing the two explorers in silhouette. Mountain trails follow the footsteps they took over ancient Indian paths. And riverfront parks commemorate sites where the explorers switched from traveling on horseback to journeying by canoe to reach the Pacific Coast.

"I was never a Lewis and Clark freak," Kearney says, "although I know some who are. I'm more interested in seeing teachers use technology for teaching and learning. That's the thrust of this project. It's hooked onto Lewis and Clark because that gives us a focus."

In a nifty metaphor, the original Corps of Discovery employed many of the best practices used in education today. The explorers pursued a powerful version of project-based learning. Real-world challenges motivated them to master new skills, from making canoes out of logs to making meals out of foods they had never tasted before. Their field studies cut across disciplines, including biology, cartography, mathematics, sociology, languages, and medicine. They kept detailed journals, reminding future generations of the power of well-chosen words. They learned to work as a team and to share leadership roles. And they were driven by a spirit of inquiry, a quest to describe and map all they saw.

As a scientist and an educator, Kearney appreciates the value of inquiry. The same process that has expanded the boundaries of scientific knowledge also helps students advance their understanding of new concepts. Through the Rediscovery Project, he says, "We have history teachers, art teachers, and English teachers using inquiry methods to explore what has changed in their communities over the past 200 years. What are the changes? How do you go about finding out? That's inquiry."

Before Lewis and Clark began their legendary road trip, they

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COURSE OF DISCOVERY

Kamiah teacher Amy Woods weaves science, social studies, Native culture, and other subjects into her summer outdoor workshop for middle school kids.

learned how to use all the tools that were then available to help them on their way. President Jefferson arranged for the nation's leading scientists to conduct pre-expedition tutorials in topics such as celestial navigation and cartography. In much the same way, Kearney and his collaborators with the Lewis and Clark Rediscovery Project are tutoring educators in using new tools that will help them reach their destination—classrooms where all students are engaged in active learning. Herewith, a couple dispatches from the field.

REVISITING HISTORY

Teacher Amy Woods is a product of Kamiah, Idaho, a town of about 1,000 that grew up alongside the Clearwater River and built its local economy on timber. Both her parents were teachers, and she remembers "a wonderful education" here, surrounded by tall trees and open spaces. The closest "big" city is Lewiston, about 65 miles downstream and with a population today of about 30,000.

Of course she knew the Lewis and Clark party had once passed this way, but admits, "I was not aware of the significance of their visit to this area. There was not even a page in our history books about them." And although Kamiah's public schools sit on land owned by the Nez Perce tribe, until recently Woods knew nothing about the role of Native Americans in the Lewis and Clark story. "Native Americans saved the lives of the men in the expedition—more than once," Woods understands today. "But I had never heard that. We grew up here knowing nothing about the Nez Perce people."

In 1998, Woods had the brainstorm of launching an outdoor workshop to provide her students with a hands-on learning experience. She was inspired by attending a conference for middle-level educators. Listening to another teacher extol the benefits of getting students out of the traditional classroom, she began to ponder how she could do the same with her eighth-graders.

"The classroom gets stagnant, for students and teachers alike," says Woods, who splits her teaching duties between Kamiah Middle School and Kamiah High School. "The appeal of an outdoor workshop is obvious. If students have an opportunity to experience firsthand what they are reading about," she says, "learning doesn't get much more real than that."

Woods selected Lewis and Clark as a theme because it's part of her community's legacy. It's also a whopper of an adventure story, certain to grab the imagination of middle school students. "This is the best survival story out there," she says, her bright blue eyes flashing enthusiasm. "You can watch a version of 'Survivor' on TV, but this is *it*." As she dug into history herself, Woods found a wealth of written materials to use in her language arts classes. She also saw the potential to weave in science, social studies, and other disciplines, and to enlist parents and other community members. "By now, the whole community gets involved," she says. But Woods's colleagues credit her for the project's success. This year, the Idaho Humanities Council honored her as an outstanding teacher.

From the start, Woods has brought a Native American perspective to her project, inviting local Nez Perce leaders and artists to conduct workshop sessions. In Kamiah schools, about 15 percent of students are Nez Perce. Relations between Native students and non-Natives "have not always been good," Woods admits. "One of our goals of the outdoor workshop was to improve that."

As a veteran teacher, Woods could see the benefits of a more multicultural education. "Our Native students would have a better appreciation for Lewis and Clark's role in history. Our non-Native students would develop an appreciation for Nez Perce culture." And all students, she hoped, would remember their three days of outdoor learning as a capstone of their middle school career.

For the past six years, the Lewis and Clark Nez Perce Outdoor Workshop has been weaving together these two strands of American history. For three days in late May, timed to coincide with the blooming of the camas flowers, eighth-graders move their classroom to an encampment on Musselshell Meadow. They sleep in tepees, identify flora documented by the Corps of Discovery and gathered by the Nez Perces, and record their experiences in journals they make by hand. Since 2001, when Woods and two colleagues from Kamiah joined the Lewis and Clark Rediscovery Project, a third strand has been intertwined with the first two. "Technology has been infused into the curriculum, allowing students to capture and record the experience digitally," she explains.

Although the three days spent under open skies are the highlight of the students' experience, their learning begins long before the actual encampment. Among the many activities of the semester-long unit:

- Mapmaking: Students become adept enough as cartographers that they can cooperatively create a map of the Lewis and Clark trail. Woods explains: "Each student begins with a blank sheet of paper and adds as many features of the journey as they can in five minutes. The maps are then passed to the next student who has 30 seconds to add more features. The maps are passed in turn until every student has a chance to add features to every map."
- Natural history studies: Students create an electronic portfolio about flora and fauna that were new to Western science when Lewis and Clark documented them. They include scanned sketches, scientific description, information on habitat,

and a quote from the Lewis and Clark journals describing the species.

• Meeting the Corps: Students draw names of expedition members and create a life-sized model of "their" Corps member, including period dress and equipment. Students also write a paper, using at least three sources, about their Corps member. For most students, it's their first major research paper assignment.

• Journaling: Students learn to use journal writing to record their field observations, respond to what they are reading, and make sketches. Students personalize their own handmade journals, including such features as covers made of tooled copper.

Before they head outdoors, students also get up to speed on using a variety of technical tools. They learn about global positioning system (GPS) receivers, handheld units that allow users to plot coordinates and download data into computer mapping software. They have a hands-on lesson in using digital cameras and software for editing images. They learn about protocols for gathering scientific data. Like members of the Corps of Discovery getting ready to embark back in 1803, or today's astronauts preparing for a space launch, students share the excitement of gearing up for an adventure into parts unknown to them.

Steve Standing and Jenifer Junior High students Matthew Schultz, Nathaniel Hoel, Chris Wagner, and Ian Coleman—and others—created a digital common fly atlas of Lewiston, tracing 200 years of change.

When it's finally time to move to Musselshell Meadow, students plunge into three days jam-packed with adventures. They live, breathe, and even eat history. Meals are cooked in the open air. Members of the Nez Perce tribe prepare a traditional salmon bake, followed by drumming and dancing. An expert at cooking with Dutch ovens makes a feast that doubles as a history lesson. Forestry experts guide students on field research, helping them become keen observers of nature. There are no showers, but at least a few students can be counted on to plunge into the cold river water. To the amazement of Woods, this is the first camping experience for at least a few students every year. "I assumed all kids growing up in Idaho would go camping," she says. Shaking her head and laughing, she adds, "Turns out I was wrong." So basic outdoors skills have been added to the lesson plans.

Although presenters vary from year to year, some have become cornerstones of the curriculum. A local Nez Perce family arrives with a string of horses to explain the tribe's expertise as breeders and equestrians. In 1805, when the Corps switched from horseback to canoes to complete their journey west, Lewis and

Clark entrusted their horses to the care of a Nez Perce named Twisted Hair. Today, members of the Nez Perce tribe continue to be involved in breeding Appaloosa stock.

Other tribal members teach students how to do beadwork or make moccasins. Native women known as "the gatherers" explain how medicines are made from plants that still grow in the region. During Lewis and Clark's trek west, many of the expedition members were exhausted and ill by the time they reached what's now Idaho. The Nez Perces could easily have overtaken them. Instead, they offered the weary travelers food and herbal remedies to nurse them back to health.

It may take students years to appreciate all that they experienced during their three days of outdoor learning. Predicts Todd Nygaard, a counselor at Kamiah High and also a member of the Lewis and Clark Rediscovery Project. "Their appreciation for the experience will grow as they get older and have a chance to reflect."

Students now attending Kamiah High already wax nostalgic about their eighth-grade camp out. One boy says he remembers the fun of doing an orienteering activity that required students to use GPS units. Another shivers and describes a spring downpour that left him drenched to the bone. "But dinner was great—I can still smell the salmon cooking," he adds. A girl smiles and says she liked sitting in a meadow, writing haiku in her journal. "It was unforgettable," adds a classmate.

As for Woods, her favorite part of the experience "is getting to see these kids in a different environment." She began her career teaching in the elementary grades, when so much is still new and fresh in the lives of young children. "That doesn't happen so much in the middle grades. Most of the time, you're reinforcing and expanding on what students already know. You're not introducing so many brand-new experiences." During the outdoor workshop, though, Woods can see her adolescent students recapture their sense of wonder. "They share three days of 'ahas!'" Out on Musselshell Meadow, they might find a wildflower that they've never seen before. When they learn it's a plant that was also new to Lewis and Clark, they appreciate what it means to make a discovery. "They're seeing things for the first time—discovering new information. As a teacher," Woods adds, "I love to be part of those first learning experiences."

200 YEARS OF CHANGE

Whether he's strolling among the headstones in the oldest section of the Lewiston cemetery or admiring the Queen Anne architecture of homes built here a century ago, Steven Branting is alert for signs of change. "In every community," says the veteran teacher, "you can find data that will help you trace changes over time."

For the past two school years, Branting has been helping a group of motivated students use a variety of technologies to track the evolution of their hometown. At Jenifer Junior High, where he is a consultant for gifted education, Branting cuts a distinctive figure in bow tie and suspenders. His students, who take his course as an elective, describe him as the kind of teacher who "doesn't let anything hold you back," as one eighth-grader puts it. "He asks us a question, then helps us along while we try to find a way to answer it."

It's a formula that seems to be working. Students in the elective class won a national award last year for creating a digital community atlas, which traces 200 years of change in their hometown. The award was given by the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), makers of the high-powered ArcView mapping software that the students learned to use to create computer-generated maps. As part of the recognition, students presented their project to an audience of more than 11,000 last summer in San Diego. Confides one of the boys with pride, "We've had college students tell us we do more interesting stuff than they get to do."

Branting learned to use the mapping software himself through the Lewis and Clark Rediscovery Project. He serves as the project's cartographer, among other roles. "I have a lot of background in making maps," he says, "but it's all been by hand. I've used the traditional methods." Those methods haven't changed much since William Clark used them to chart the first maps of the West. Branting could see that the mapping software opened some exciting possibilities, especially when coupled with GPS units that record coordinates in the field, data sets provided by the U.S. Census and other sources, and satellite photos that can capture the smallest details in an aerial view.

The students at Jenifer Junior High have learned to use all these tools to create their comprehensive community atlas. In a series of electronic slides that include maps, photographs, and text, their atlas shows how Lewiston has evolved since Lewis and Clark's first visit in 1805. Discussions and visuals focus on land use, industry, housing, education, and other topics. (The project is online at www.esri.com/industries/k-12/atlas/lewiston/index.html.)

Once they completed the atlas, students were ready to tackle more specific challenges that bring together history and technology. Their teacher pointed them in the direction of an intriguing local mystery: What happened a century ago, when Lewiston outgrew its first cemetery and moved the old graves to a new setting? Who lies buried in the section of unmarked graves?

The junior high students had no qualms about investigating the resting place of their city's earliest citi-

zens. Armed with GPS units and digital cameras, they walked the rows of headstones. They entered the coordinates of every grave dated earlier than 1888, when the old cemetery was relocated. Back at the school library, they used computers to generate a database of information about the 120 deceased. They used mapping software and satellite photos to create a visual representation of the cemetery. More research sent them looking through old newspapers for obituaries. They found more than 50 names of those who had died before 1888, but whose graves could not be found in the newer cemetery.

The mystery of the unmarked graves all but solved, students are now preparing to take a subterranean look by using ground-penetrating radar and magnetic induction to "read" the unknown grave sites. Says Branting: "My students have learned they can solve mysteries through technology."

Branting continues to pose questions that get students—and teachers—excited about learning. For the Lewis and Clark Rediscovery Project, he has created a series of WebQuests that challenge students to use online sources to solve mysteries. He also conducts professional development workshops for his colleagues about how to design a good WebQuest so that students will use inquiry methods to reach their own conclusions.

"As a teacher, you don't want to give the students too many answers," he says. "Your role is to help students organize their thinking. Give them a structure, and make technology available to help them come up with their own solutions." (Descriptions of his WebQuests—ranging from how a sextant works to investigating Meriwether Lewis's death—are online at www.lewiston.k12.id.us/sbranting/newport/home.htm.)

In his own career in the classroom, Branting has honed his skills at differentiating instruction. His role as a consultant in the Lewiston schools "is not just to help teach gifted students," he explains. "I'm trying to enrich the program to challenge all kids." Too many learning activities have a built-in ceiling, he says. "They aren't open-ended enough." His strategy is to set the sky as the limit, so that students ready to take off can do so. At the same time, he makes minimum expectations clear and also "high enough" so that all students will have to stretch to reach their goals.

Two centuries ago, President Jefferson sent the Corps of Discovery west in pursuit of interesting questions: What's out there? What can you learn about plants, animals, people, rivers, resources? Today, says Branting, every community can still find good questions to investigate. And in the pursuit of answers, students will experience the thrill of "learning all you can."

THE ROAD AHEAD

As the Lewis and Clark Rediscovery Project approaches its last year of grant funding, participants are focusing on disseminating the lessons they have learned. The lead teachers are conducting inservice training sessions for their local colleagues and planning intensive summer workshops. "The object is for teachers to come in the door with a lesson in mind and leave at the end of the week with technology integrated into that lesson to make it better," explains Kearney.

In addition, the Rediscovery Web site (http://rediscovery.ed.uidaho.edu/) continues to expand with classroom resources developed by this 21st century corps of educators. The site has become the gateway to everything from photo libraries of sites along the trail to community stories documenting evidence of change. Graduate-level courses are available through a distance-learning arrangement with the University of Idaho.

The big lessons learned through the Rediscovery Project will live on, Kearney predicts. Every community in the country has seen "an enormous amount of local changes" since the day when Lewis and Clark first set their sights on the West. "And looking at change offers an interesting way to get kids focused on using technology to help them learn," Kearney says. When you turn kids loose with a good question and the right tools, he adds, "they just mow you out of the way." □

ON THE TRAIL OF HISTORY IN MONTANA

Crossing great distances of time and place, six rural teachers and their students plunge together into the enduring lessons of Lewis and Clark.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DENISE JARRETT WEEKS

THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE, Montana—They're called the Missouri Breaks: deep incisions formed by the retreat of the glaciers and the waters of the Missouri River watershed. Here, you can see sculpted cliffs of variegated browns, sandstone spires, and rocky shorelines that awed even the intrepid Lewis and Clark.

If you're near the breaks in springtime and can make your way across the stubble of winter wheat that disguises a thick carpet of mud, you've a thrill in store. Only at the instant you reach its precipice do you realize you've arrived at one of the breaks, where the ground plunges below to the river or to one of its tributaries. Here, just outside Denton —east of Great Falls—the exhilarating abyss is courtesy of Arrow Creek, a Missouri River tributary.

"Upside-down mountains" is how Ken Mapston describes the breaks to an astonished visitor. An artist, lifelong resident of the region, and recently retired vocational agriculture teacher at the Denton School, Mapston speaks knowledgeably about the natural and cultural history of this landscape.

Pointing north to a distant range, Mapston says these are the Bears Paw Mountains where Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce tribe surrendered to the U.S. Army in 1877. Nodding east toward the rolling plains, he says this is where Indian tribes from all over the region—Nez Perce, Kootenai, Salish, Cheyenne, Sioux, Assiniboine, Peigan Blackfeet—would come together seasonally to hunt buffalo.

The river breaks that cleave these ancient hunting grounds inspired Meriwether Lewis to write that they were "seens of visionary inchantment." Both Lewis and William Clark would name tributaries—the Judith and Marias rivers—after favorite cousins.

But Lewis also deemed this territory the "Deserts of America," doubting whether "any part can ever be Settled, as it is deficent in water,

Square Butte in Montana, made famous by the artist Frederic Remington, was also remarkable to Meriwether Lewis who called it Barn Mountain for its flat barnlike "roof."

Timber & too Steep to be tilled."

He couldn't have been more wrong. Today, from the air, one can see that the Montana plains are a Mondrian canvas of winter wheat, barley, and hay fields. The soil is the richest of clay loam. Thousands of miles of irrigation ditches funnel water from the rivers to the crops. Anheuser-Busch is a big buyer around here. And Angus and Hereford cattle, instead of the vast herds of buffalo and elk of Lewis and Clark's time, now graze on the grasslands.

"Things have changed," says Mapston, "very much."

Nevertheless, this stretch of the Lewis and Clark trail—perhaps 300 miles from the Yellowstone to the Marias—is the least changed of the entire route. Tourist guidebooks still warn travelers that it's difficult to visit the Missouri Breaks. There are few roads and the hiking is tough. For residents, isolation is both a blessing and a challenge. For Ken Mapston and his wife, Cindy, an elementary teacher at the Denton School, it's a 90-mile drive to go grocery shopping in Great Falls.

The Denton School, a K–12 building with 131 students, is part of the Golden Triangle Cooperative. About 35 rural school districts, arrayed across 40,000 square miles in north central Montana, pool resources and expertise to address curriculum, assessment, and professional development needs of the 50 member schools.

Four years ago, Cindy Mapston joined five other teachers from the cooperative in a project that has led them along their own journeys of discovery. On a winter day when foul weather had closed the airports, the six teachers met for the first time as they climbed into a van and set out down the highway for Moscow, Idaho. There they would meet other teachers from schools spanning the length of the Lewis and Clark trail, from St. Louis to Astoria, for the kick-off of the Lewis and Clark Rediscovery Project. The road trip sealed a bond among these rural Montana teachers. By the time they pulled into Moscow, they knew they were embarking on friendships as well as professional growth.

The five-year project, a federally funded Technology Innovation Challenge Grant, aims to help teachers master technology and foster its use in teaching and learning. Using the impetus of the Lewis and Clark bicentennial, teachers and their students examine life along the historic and present-day Lewis and Clark trail, using technology to study local segments of the trail as they were 200 years ago and as they are today.

1) Cindy Mapston's students clamber onto a cottonwood—a tree frequently used by Lewis and Clark for canoes—to show off their model boats.
2) Front: Jace Jelinek, Guy Forbis, Karyn Pegg. Standing: James Brentley Gremax. Back: Jenna Boxma, Michelle Melton.

It's now spring of the fourth year of the grant, and Cindy Mapston's fifth-graders at the Denton School are looking backward, into history. They've been trying to solve the problem Meriwether Lewis had in putting together his collapsible "iron boat." The men of the Corps of Discovery had hauled the iron frame all the way from Harpers Ferry, Virginia, to the Great Falls of the Missouri in Montana. The idea was to assemble it after they'd portaged 18 miles around the five great "cataracts" of the river and transfer their supplies from the heavy wooden canoes into the lighter weight iron-frame boat. But they couldn't concoct a reliable sealant from materials on hand to keep the elk-and-buffalo skin boat from taking on water. With great disappointment, Lewis abandoned it, instructing his men to bury it along with other "trivial articles." Never again mentioned or found, the iron boat has inspired mystery and speculation.

And it has inspired Mapston and her students to collapse time by taking on the personae of Corps of Discovery members, investigate why the boat failed, and design and build a better one.

Crowded into the computer lab this morning are "York," "Charbonneau," "John Ordway," "Patrick Gass," and other Corps members dressed in fur and peaked hats and "buckskin" coats.

"George Drewyer" (aka Karyn) slides into a chair at one of the tables to put finishing touches to her team's blueprint, though their model boat is already finished. The Endurance, a handsome keelboat, rests on the tabletop, its sails in seemingly full blow.

Other team members gather at computers, preparing PowerPoint presentations that will display digital photos of their models and enumerate the innovative features of their boats. Anticipation is high, as they'll soon be meeting Meriwether Lewis and President Thomas Jefferson (their costumed teachers) who will hear them out as they attempt to convince the men that their boat

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is of superior design for the river expedition.

But this morning, there's a hitch in the plan. Frustration is rising at one of the computer terminals, and Mapston goes to give aid. Two Corps members are struggling to save an image to their PowerPoint file.

"Images do that, they're huge," says Mapston reassuringly. "That's why saving to the server is best. Where are the two best places to save?"

In unison, "William Clark" and "George Shannon" (Megan and Tylyn) reply, "To the server and to the disk."

But the disk is full and the school's server is down, so Mapston has them save their image to the desktop for the time being.

"Hopefully tomorrow the server will be up," she tells the girls.

In the resourceful spirit of the original Corps, the students leave the computers for the day and go back to their classroom to implement Plan B: testing the buoyancy of their model boats and practicing their oral presentations.

QUESTING

Being resourceful is the only way to get by for teachers and students at small schools with few resources and isolated by great distances. Cindy Mapston spends long nights writing grant proposals to such funders as Albertson's Foundation and the federal Rural Education Achievement Program. Grants have enabled her to expand her school's resources. She's become the educational technology expert in her building by default and determination, and, as a participant in the Rediscovery Project, she facilitates online teacher training programs that help other Montana teachers become more skilled users of technology.

She's also participating in another major project with other teachers in the Golden Triangle Cooperative, which has won a coveted Teaching American History Grant. The grant aims to raise teachers' knowledge of the nation's history and sharpen their skills in presenting it to students. Much of what the teachers have learned through the Rediscovery Project, they'll apply to the objectives of this new grant.

For the Rediscovery Project, Mapston has created a WebQuest of her iron boat curriculum for grades 5–12 that's aligned to the curriculum standards of the Golden Triangle Cooperative and includes an assessment rubric. WebQuests are inquiry-oriented learning activities that draw on the resources of the World Wide Web (http://webquest.sdsu.edu/).

In the "Iron Boat Quest," (www.gtccmt.org/webquests/cindy/teacher_page.html), students learn all they can about Lewis's iron boat and theorize about why it failed. To test their theories, they build models of the iron frame using materials found in 1805. They create model boats of their own design and test their seaworthiness in a nearby pond. They form "boat manufacturing companies" and prepare sales presentations, advertising campaigns, and mock patent applications to market their boats.

Throughout, they're learning history, math, science, technology, language arts, fine arts, and wood- and metalworking. They research books and online sources, interview experts, visit museums, and do plenty of hands-on activities. This project-based learning approach also hones life skills, says Mapston, such as critical and independent thinking.

There's quite a bit of thinking going on right now, as a matter of fact, as team members huddle conspiratorially in the far corners of the classroom. With whispered urgency, they're preparing their presentation strategies while being careful not to give away any trade secrets.

Josh, as Charbonneau, closely questions his mates about the features of their boat: "Mr. Clark, does this boat have any upgrades from the previous iron boat?"

Clark/Megan: "This one's bigger. And if the middle part breaks, you can take out the middle part and hook the other two parts together. And you can break it down into a lot of little pieces if you have to cross the mountains."

Charbonneau/Josh: "What happens if you come in touch with the French or Spanish armies?"

York/Robert: "The cannons are super-graded so they can do lots of damage."

Charbonneau/Josh: "How many gifts will you be able to store for the Indians?"

York/Robert: "Two hundred packs of beads, and they love metal knives so we're going to pack 20 of them."

PROBLEM SOLVING

In the five years of the project, Mapston's seen her students' standardized test scores go up, particularly in math, science, and history. And she's seeing something else, too.

"I'm not just teaching them American history, but to work cooperatively—citizenship, cooperation, kindness, things they'll need to know when they go beyond Denton School," she says. Learning in this active, cooperative, and cross-disciplinary way allows even her special-needs students to excel alongside their classmates. And every student's resilience and persistence have been tested by unexpected obstacles.

Now, as seasoned problem solvers, they know to always have a

Plan B. For example, if their model boat had failed its test-launch, "team members had a plan for how to make their presentations even if their boat sunk," says Mapston, "and that was to say how they solved it."

If delving into the lives, hardships, and triumphs of the Corps of Discovery has taught them nothing else, they've learned this: "They know there are a lot of ups and downs in life," Mapston says.

FAIRFIELD

On their eastward journey home, Lewis and a scouting party passed near today's community of Fairfield. They hoped to follow the Marias River to the 50th parallel, effectively extending U.S. territory. Along the way, they came upon a stunning sight: an immense number of buffalo blanketing the plains.

"I sincerely belief that there were not less than 10 thousand buffaloe within a circle of 2 miles," wrote Lewis. They immediately killed one particularly fat bovine and made a dinner of it beside Medicine River.

Today, the Medicine is known as the Sun River. Girdled by dams, it's the primary font for waters that flow through some 60,000 miles of irrigation ditches. The waters feed 91,000 acres of wheat, oat, barley, alfalfa, silage, and pasture along the river and its tributaries.

In the farming town of Fairfield, Charlie Brown teaches history at the high school and is a member of the Lewis and Clark Honor Guard, a group of men who do historical research and reenactments of the Corps of Discovery. Brown's chosen Corps member is Joseph Fields, an expert hunter who accompanied Lewis up the Marias. Today, dressed in full Honor Guard regalia, he is showing visitors some of the high technology the Corps members used in their expedition: chronometer, sextant, rifle, and gunpowder horn and tamp. Looking on are two of his students, Chase and Brian, seniors who fully expect to be using 21st century technology in their chosen careers. Chase is going into farming; Brian into the military.

COMMUNICATING

The students have gotten a solid introduction to computer technology in Brown's history class. Like some other students in the Rediscovery Project, Chase and Brian created a WebQuest for their classmates to embark on, but they diverged sharply from the Lewis and Clark trail. Instead, they explored a very different U.S. military undertaking —in Vietnam.

They created a virtual tour through modern Vietnam, from the war to today. In the WebQuest, students explore nine cities—from the port city of Ben Tre, through Ho Chi Minh, to Halong Bay—gathering photos and data depicting the effect of the war on the communities and what those cities are like today (http://gtccmt.org/webquests/chuck-students/Brian-Chase_files/frame.htm).

As they talk about their project, it so happens that today, March 19, is the first day of the war in Iraq. The students pause for a moment, considering these disparate U.S. military expeditions into "Indian Country," Vietnam, and Iraq.

"It does have a parallel, not perfectly parallel, but there is one," says Brian, who is already a reservist in a military press camp. On weekend duty, he's learning broadcast journalism, using state-of-the-art digital technology.

Though spread over 200 years, each of these three missions had to contend with the reality of geography and physics. "Just the technology's changed is about what it comes down to," says Brian. "Nowadays, we aren't going in so blindsided, because we have satellites and everything; we know what's out there. It's not like Lewis and Clark, they had no idea what to expect."

Except, says Jeredene Mayfield, coordinator for the Golden Triangle's Rediscovery Project who's visiting today, "if Lewis and Clark had

1) Front: Josey Carter, Tylyn Newcomb, Thane Melton, Jordan Lahr. Back: Jenna Bokma, Michelle Melton
2) Joshua Floranie, Megan Ray, Robert Todd
3) Fairfield High School teacher Charlie Brown (as Corpsman "Joseph Fields") with students Chase Brady and Brian Watson.
4) Jeredene Mayfield coordinates the Rediscovery Project for the Golden Triangle Cooperative

listened to the Indians they'd have known exactly what to expect. The Indians tried to teli them everything. Ultimately, everything that the Indians did tell them turned out to be true."

This raises the question: What's the role of technology in human relations?

"Face-to-face contact is really good, because you can correspond your ideas and talk things out," says Brian. "But with technology, being able to communicate over the Internet, with video equipment, whatnot, it makes it nice because there's some things that you can show easier on a video."

Charlie Brown says the Internet has been indispensable to teachers involved in the project. "That's how we were able to communicate, the six members of our Rediscovery Project. We used the Internet, we used ICQ.com, we used Yahoo Groups, Yahoo Chat, listservs. We're hundreds of miles apart and we're in better communication than some people in the same building. We were on the Internet every Wednesday night," says Brown.

"We just set aside that time in our lives," says Mayfield, "to ask

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questions and sometimes we just needed to tell a joke."

"Or vent," Brown adds.

"Yeah, or vent," says Mayfield with a laugh.

Chase observes, "It makes the world a smaller place," but he's not convinced that's always a good thing. Closing the distance among people around the globe through technology can also close the differences that make a culture distinct, he says.

Yet, as a future farmer, Chase is eager to use technology to help make his farm efficient and environmentally sound. These days, he says, farmers can use satellite imaging to locate and identify species of weeds, for example, enabling them to treat precise areas with limited amounts of herbicide.

Becoming aware of the potential uses and misuses of technology may be one of the most valuable aspects of bringing technology into the classroom. Brown has seen the benefits to his students every year of the Rediscovery Project, but, as an historical reenactor, he also knows the power of real-time, hands-on learning.

"As a reenactor, I'm able to bring firsthand research to the students as far as what Lewis and Clark were all about," he says. "I can actually show them the dress, the guns, the other accoutrements that they had with them. It brings the history to life for the kids."

CUT BANK AND SHELBY

Two weeks after their feast of buffalo on the Medicine River, Lewis and his party forayed to the end of the Marias and up its tributary, Cut Bank Creek. By now convinced that neither river reached the 50th parallel, he, nonetheless, tried for two days to make celestial observations using a chronometer and sextant to fix his location, but clouds foiled his efforts. He named the spot Camp Disappointment.

Today, middle school students from the towns of Cut Bank and Shelby have had better luck taking scientific readings along Cut Bank Creek. They wade into the cold waters to measure temperature, turbidity, and levels of oxygen, nitrogen, alkalinity, and pH. Pulling nets through the currents, they scoop out macroinvertebrates—the midge larva, mayfly and damsel nymphs, and myriad others—and place them in plastic tubs where they are classified and counted.

It's a global effort, all this data gathering. And the sixth-grade students of Mark Ayers at Cut Bank Middle School and Tammerah Robertson at Meadowlark School in Shelby are rightly proud of their contributions to science.

They're following protocols set out by Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE). GLOBE is a worldwide program in which students from 95 countries collect data on the atmosphere, lakes and streams, soil, plants, and animals and submit them to a database where the findings are analyzed by scientists around the world (www.globe.gov/).

But here, along the eastern edge of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, what students really want to know is: Is the creek healthy? Has it been degraded since Lewis and Clark passed through here 200 years ago? They know that the macroinvertebrates are the "canaries" of the stream, that their numbers and variety are a good indication of whether the waters are healthy or polluted.

"We report data to GLOBE, but we also want to know, what does that mean to us, in Cut Bank, Montana?" says Ayers, who teaches science and technology. "They need to know what the results mean. How does that fit into our ecosystem?"

Even before signing on with the GLOBE project, students had grown to know their creek and its critters pretty well through Team Trout, a unit Ayers has taught for several years. They start the unit by taking a look at the tiny, wriggly creatures that inhabit the currents and provide nourishment to the trout in the creek.

"Most kids have never looked at macroinvertebrates, so it just grabs their interest," says Ayers. "Now that we have them hooked, so to speak, we teach them how to identify them. Then we count them. Once you count them and figure out how many species, what does that mean to this stream?"

His students have learned to classify the creatures into three types according to their sensitivity to pollution: Red Bug (sensitive), Blue Bug (somewhat tolerant), Brown Bug (highly tolerant).

"That seems to help them to understand what it means to find that macroinvertebrate. GLOBE just teaches you: This is a mayfly. This is a stonefly. Names are one thing, but our kids can go out and say, hey, that's a Red Bug. They know it's sensitive to pollution, so that's a good one to find. If you find lots of Reds, it means the stream is fairly healthy."

So, when the class first started collecting data for GLOBE, they were already expert in identifying and

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1,2) Teachers Tammeran Robertson and Mark Ayers engage their students in scientific readings of the creeks and atmosphere of their neighboring towns.
3) Students classify and count macroinvertebrates to gauge the health of Cut Bank Creek.
4) "Learn to use, then use to learn" is the philosophy of technology teacher Jennifer Schlepp.

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counting macroinvertebrates. And they go even farther, moving on to identify the bigger critters: fish. They learn to identify fish and their varied adaptations and habitat. Each year, the high point of the unit is tying flies and goin' fishin'.

"It's a great way to teach how animals have adapted to the environment," says Ayers.

MEASURING

The technology training he's gotten as part of the Rediscovery Project fits neatly into the GLOBE work, says Ayers. "It's kept me fired up and going with GLOBE. Basically it's given me resources, connections, and knowledge to be a better science and computer teacher. It's been awesome. The only reason I teach computers is because of the information that I've learned in the Rediscovery Project," he says.

Cut Bank and Shelby students now hang some pretty impressive techie skills from their technological "tool belts." They're mastering Inspiration, Picture It, VR Works, Internet, CD-ROMs, digital cameras, chinometers, even global positioning system (GPS) instruments.

And they're famous, sort of. A public TV and radio series on educational technology, called PT3 Now (www.pt3now.org/), taped Ayers's and Robertson's students one cold, bright day as they fanned out across the creek collecting data for GLOBE. The video shows students as they hold their scientific instruments under the water and up into the atmosphere—measuring, counting, analyzing. Their faces are rosy, yet furrowed with the concentration of scientists.

Back in Shelby, Robertson's students also keep close tabs on the atmosphere. They've set up their weather station in the front yard of the local judge's house—pretty much dissuading any ne'er-do-wells from messing with it. Every day, they troop across the street to read their instruments and record air temperature, humidity, barometric pressure, cloud cover, and precipitation, and to chart daylight and darkness.

All this measuring and recording is fun, says Justin, a student at Shelby, but looking closely at how the world works—uncovering its secrets—can also be a little unnerving. "I've always wondered if the earth hadn't been invented," he muses, "what would be here? It just feels weird. It kind of scares me."

It was probably a bit scary, too, for some young man in the Corps of Discovery who, leaving familiarity far behind, faced what was unknown to him with only his courage, skill, and technology of the day.

CONRAD

A day's horse ride from Camp Disappointment, Lewis and his men had their only fatal clash with Indians. In a dawn skirmish over horses and guns, Corps members killed two Blackfeet men. Lewis's party quickly struck camp and set out by horseback across the prairie, making a beeline for their rendezvous with Clark and the others at the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers.

In their hasty retreat, Lewis's scouting party rode past what is today the town of Conrad. At Utterback Middle School in Conrad, Jennifer Schlepp is preparing for her class of eighth-graders to arrive for the afternoon's integrated technology class. A math and science teacher, Schlepp, like some of her partners in the Rediscovery Project, has grown into the role of technology teacher as her own skills developed through her work in the project.

Today, she's honed a principle that guides her teaching of technology through project-based learning: "learn to use, then use to learn." At each grade level, students extend their burgeoning technology skills by working on projects that culminate with public presentations.

"Everything we do in technology class is presentation based," says Schlepp.

The progression goes something like this: In sixth grade, students learn the basics of Word and Inspiration, a concept mapping program (www.inspiration.com/). Then, in seventh grade, they expand their proficiency in Word and Inspiration and add to their repertoire ArcView, an interactive mapping software program (www.esri.com/software/arcview/). In eighth grade, they expand their proficiency further in Word, Inspiration, and ArcView, and add the presentation software program PowerPoint.

With each step in the progression, they're sharing their work with other classmates by using the classroom's SmartBoard, an interactive whiteboard that can be linked to a computer. The screen of the SmartBoard is sensitive to touch, so kids can "click" on Web links as they present their material at the front of the room, or even write on the screen with special styluses.

This year's eighth-graders have undertaken a WebQuest that Schlepp has created for them called "MemberQuest" (www.gtccmt.org/webquests/jen/top.htm). The activity is aligned with the learning objectives of the Golden Triangle Cooperative and Montana's state standards.

"You are the captains of the

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Corps of Discovery," reads the introduction. "President Jefferson has asked for a report of the members you chose to make the trip. What kind of people did you choose? What expertise do they have for the journey into the unknown?"

To learn all they can about the men and woman of the Corps of Discovery, Schlepp and her students traveled to the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center in Great Falls, about 80 miles away. There, they interviewed historians and reenactors of the Corps members and took digital photos of the lifelike exhibits and dioramas. They gathered information and images on the weapons, food, clothing, transportation, cartography, and ethnography of the period. All of this went into their multimedia presentations.

MAPPING

Students are also learning to use ArcView, a mapping tool that would have made Lewis and Clark dance around the campfire if they'd had it. ArcView is a visualization software program that turns data into powerful geographic displays. Students can delve into the deepest of databases and come up with all manner of information that can be mapped geographically.

In Conrad, these eighth-grade digital explorers want to know: What did the Corpsmen do for entertainment when they camped along the trail? Which tribes did they encounter, and where? Did their diet change along the route?

"We simply divided the trail by the number of students in the class," says Schlepp. Students queried a database of the expedition's Montana campsites, created by Robert Bergantino for the University of Montana (for more information about this database, contact him at BBergantino@mtech.edu). They each chose a different segment of the Montana trail to study, such as from April 7 to June 2, 1805—both as it was when Lewis and Clark passed through and how it is today.

Then they queried databases containing the original journal entries, such as these caches of all-things-Lewis-and-Clark: Public Broadcasting System's www.pbs.org/lewisandclark/ and University of Nebraska at Lincoln's http://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/.

Selecting journal passages dated when Corps members were on a particular segment of the trail, students read gripping passages about the expedition's often hair-raising experiences in Montana. Charging grizzly bears, spine-tingling precipices, boat-smashing waterfalls, and other omnipresent challenges faced by the Corps of Discovery make for some of the best adventure travel writing any middle school kid could want.

Each student brings his or her research together with illustrations from their own digital photographs and images pulled from a Lewis and Clark CD-ROM produced for the Rediscovery Project. Then they present their geographical and illustrated

Indians throughout the region came to Montana's high plains to hunt the massive herds of buffalo. Upon seeing such a herd, Lewis exclaimed in his journal, "I sincerely belief that there were not less than 10 thousand buffaloe within a circle of 2 miles. . . ."

displays—constructed with ArcView, Inspiration, PowerPoint, and Word—on the SmartBoard to a rapt audience of their classmates.

In the second half of the term, they study the same segment of the trail as it is today, 200 years later. Using the same technology, as well as Picture It! and Photoshop, they build a "travel brochure" of the area. Not only do they present their travelogues digitally on the SmartBoard, but they create graphically rich paper brochures that test the limits of their digital publishing skills. These inviting paper brochures are displayed now on the classroom wall, colorful artifacts of these students' digital journeys into American history. □

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Right Under Their Noses

NATIVE PLANTS IN THE SCHOOLYARD

From the humble blackberry to the lovely dogwood, plants prized by Native people and made famous by Lewis and Clark draw these amateur ethnobotanists from their inner-city middle school.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BRACKEN REED

PORTLAND, Oregon—Just outside the main entrance of Harriet Tubman Middle School, students are surveying the small garden of native plants they helped bring to life. Judi Lampi, the instructor of this after-school ethnobotany class, gives her students a lighthearted pop quiz as they wander among the plants. "What's this?" she challenges, bending down and running her hand over a low-lying ground cover with thick, dark-green leaves. "Kinnikinnick!" the students call out in ragged unison, making this wonderful word sound like a full marching band of clashing consonants. Similar responses come with each new challenge, the names of the plants rolling off the students' tongues, as familiar now as the names of their friends or the streets on which they live: "Salal! Red cedar! Oregon grape!"

From behind the building comes the rolling hum of rush-hour traffic, commuters heading home on Interstate 5, car tires making a steady, tidal splash on the rain-slicked highway. But here in front of the school students are nose-to-needle, finger-to-leaf with plants that Meriwether Lewis documented in his journals nearly 200 years before, plants that Native people named and knew and relied on for ages before Lewis and Clark arrived. For an hour a week, over the course of many months, these students will piece together a deeper understanding of their region by looking at the interrelationship of plant life and human cultures, the interningling of the ancient past and the dizzying present.

TEACHING YOUR PASSION

For teacher Judi Lampi, helping students discover the beauty and complexity of their home place is a natural extension of her own childhood. "My great-grandparents homesteaded near Astoria," she says, "not that far from Fort Clatsop," where Lewis and William Clark's Corps of Discovery wintered near the coast. "I grew up in Portland, but my extended family was still there, so I spent a lot of time there as a kid. I've heard about the Lewis and Clark story all my life." Her interest in the native flora of the region has similar roots in childhood, she says. "My grandfather was a logger and also a great lover of nature—he knew all the trees and plants. He used to take me on walks in the woods and point out everything to me, tell me the names. He taught me a love of the outdoors and a respect for the plants."

For more than a decade, Lampi has combined these lifelong interests in her ethnobotany class at Tubman. A mixed-age, mixed-ability class, it has been offered as a regular school day elective or as an after-school program, depending on the funding available. The class is a perfect fit at Tubman, an ethnically diverse, 6–8, Title I school that is one of three health sciences/biotechnology magnet schools in the district. "It fits well with the overall focus of the school," says Lampi. "There's a strong technology component and we study the medicinal uses of the plants, which link directly to subjects like pharmacology, biology, health, and environmental studies. And it also appeals to a lot of different learning styles and backgrounds. Going outside and learning about plants is fun. I haven't met a kid yet who doesn't love it."

Now being offered as an after-school program, the class is not graded, but students are held to high standards. Lampi brings passion and dedication to the subject and she expects the same from her students. Each prospective class member must write an essay explaining why he or she wants to learn about this subject. Enrollment is kept to a maximum of 20, ensuring a lot of one-to-one attention, and students are expected to complete all assignments and keep regular attendance or they are not allowed to go on field trips.

The combination of a compelling subject with local relevance and a committed, enthusiastic teacher has attracted a lot of outside interest and support over the years. The class has benefited from several grants and community partnerships, including Options in Science grants, the present Lewis and Clark Rediscovery Project grant, and collaborations with Portland State University, Oregon Health & Science University, and the Waters Foundation. In addition, many volunteers, both individuals and organizations—some who are fascinated with the Lewis and Clark story, others who are dedicated to native plants and the environment—have rallied around the class.

Friends of Trees, a Portland nonprofit organization, was a major help in creating the urban green space of native plants that provides such an inviting presence at the

front of the school. They donated all of the plants, helped students with the design and planting, and continue to be closely involved with its upkeep. The garden is more than just a pleasant green space—it is also directly tied to the curriculum of the class. "All of the plants are chosen from among the 176 that Lewis documented in his journals," says Lampi.

Lampi focuses her students' attention on plants common to the Lower Columbia region. "We choose those that are specific to our area, so not only can kids study them in the garden, they can also find them in the local forests or even in their neighborhood," she says. While parts of the larger story are frequently discussed, Lampi uses this same localized approach for the entire curriculum, focusing on the Lower Columbia, from the former Celilo Falls near The Dalles—which disappeared after the river was dammed—to the river's mouth near Astoria.

A WEALTH OF MATERIAL

"Lewis's journals are an amazing resource for educators," says Lampi. "The fact that he documented all of these plants allows me to tie together a variety of subjects—I can teach kids about the native plants in their area, but I can also bring in the story of the expedition." The end result for students, she says, is a much broader understanding of their region. "They know more about the natural environment that surrounds them and they know more about the human history that has taken place here. The journals personalize this in a way kids can relate to—the adventures, the hardships—it's a very compelling story."

On this drizzling, late afternoon in March students seem happy enough to brave the elements—the winter hardships that the Corps of Discovery endured at Fort Clatsop perhaps not yet firmly etched in their minds. Their brief tour of the garden is soggy, but refreshing after a long school day. Reluctantly, students head back into the warm, dry comfort of the classroom. Lampi quickly gets them back on task. "I want you to look through these books and find your plant," she says, while passing out copies of *Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast* by Jim Pojar and Andy MacKinnon (1994) and *Ethnobotany of Western Washington* by Erna Gunther and Jeanne R. Janish (1973). Soon, fingers are flying through indexes and tables of contents as students look for the familiar names.

At the beginning of each new term, Lampi has her students pick one plant to focus on. During the rest of the year they will come to know this plant as an old friend. They will find passages in Lewis's journals that describe it, and they will research current literature about it. They will know how Native people used it and what place it had in their cultures, and they will learn about its modern medical and dietary uses. They will document what they learn, using everything from pencils to PDF files, journals to JPGs. And along the way, they will have a chance to plant and tend to it in the garden, to know what it smells like, to watch how a season changes it, and to search for it along the banks of the river that Lewis and Clark followed to the sea.

TOOLS OF DISCOVERY

"I want you to write down this Web page address," Lampi tells her students, as she uses her laptop to take them on a tour of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello home. "You can actually do a virtual-reality tour. It's like flying around the room." The students don't seem the least bit surprised to be exploring 200-year-old subject matter through the portal of modern technology. On their journey to discover more about their region, Lampi and her students will use every digital-age tool they can get their hands on, and surfing the Web is only the beginning. Thanks in part to the Rediscovery grant, students will be documenting their chosen plants in ways Meriwether Lewis could not have imagined.

One of the distinctive features of the program is this mix of the ancient and the up-to-the-minute, both in subject matter and in process. Students keep journals, make drawings, and consult written materials, much as Lewis and Clark would have. But they also use digital cameras, software programs, and satellite mapping systems.

A journey in itself, Lampi walks

Harriet Tubman Middle School students tend t
their school's native plant garden.

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her students through a complex process of using technology to document their chosen plants. Students take photographs using digital cameras, then learn how to digitally edit them using Photoshop software. Next, she guides them through the process of using Adobe Acrobat to create portable document format (PDF) files so they can post the information they have gathered online. Finally, Lampi and her students work on a Web page that shares their knowledge with the world, so that anyone who wants to can use the information for a journey of his own (www.nwrel.org/teachlewisandclark/free/portland.html).

While Lampi has been teaching her Lewis and Clark–oriented ethnobotany class for more than 10 years, the Lewis and Clark Rediscovery grant has provided equipment and training in the use of global positioning system (GPS) units, geographic information systems (GIS), and other advanced technology that neither she nor her students would otherwise have had a chance to learn to use.

ON THE RIVER

Each year, on the last weekend of May, Lampi leads her students on a three-day canoe trip down the Columbia River. It is a chance to complete the circle of learning—to bring all of their classroom and field studies to bear in one real-world situation. "One of my main goals for the class is that students get to experience a small part of what Lewis and Clark experienced," she says. "I emphasize that we are on the river for three days, while they were on the river for nearly three years, but it is a very valuable part of the learning process." By taking her students on the river, Lampi hopes to replicate Lewis and Clark's progression from studying and planning to the testing of their knowledge in the real world.

Students prepare for the trip by making a list of all necessary equipment. During the course of the journey, they will keep a journal, take photographs, read aloud from the journals of Lewis and Clark written on the exact same days almost 200 years earlier, and experience many of the joys and struggles of canoeing and camping alongside a major western river.

While some teachers might find a canoe trip with 20 middle school kids nearly as daunting as the original journey of Lewis and Clark, Lampi obviously loves the challenge. And she has a lot of help. "The Multnomah Athletic Club donates the use of the canoes and all the other necessary gear, and we have a lot of parent volunteers. We also take every precaution: trained lifeguards, an emergency-response team on call, cell phones, volunteers that follow in cars, and one adult for every child in a boat. It's definitely a team effort." For Lampi it is also a kind of annual homecoming ritual. "My dad crosses the river in his boat to help us safely cross the shipping channel, and he also brings us firewood. It's a real family event for me."

The first day of the trip is spent on the Washington side of the river. Students are given ample time to observe the flora and fauna, write and draw in their journals, search the banks for native plants they have studied, and enjoy the camaraderie that teamwork and cooperation bring. At meal times they read from Lewis and Clark's journals and compare them with their own, trade stories and observations from their day, and, in some years, are entertained by the sounds of the Washington Old-Time Fiddlers Association as it plays tunes that Lewis and Clark might have enjoyed while sitting around the campfire.

The following days include many more opportunities for adventure and learning. From the occasional overturned canoe, to portaging around difficult (or low-tide) areas, students gain a first-hand experience of the difficulties of river travel. The trip is also a lesson in the changes that 200 years have brought to the region. "The most nerve-wracking part of the trip is crossing from the Washington to the Oregon side of the river during the second day," says Lampi. "Many people don't realize that on the Columbia there are major shipping vessels coming through every 26 minutes. That's how long we have to get from one side of the river to the next without getting caught in the wake of one of the ships.

"All in all, we've had very good luck," says Lampi. "The weather has generally been amazingly good for us. But no matter what, it's a really great time and a special experience for the kids." For anyone who has spent even one sunny afternoon on the Columbia in late spring, it's easy to understand the powerful impression the trip can make on students.

After months of study, learning about native plants, Native American cultures, and the journey of Lewis and Clark, students have a context for understanding their home region that many residents will never have. At the end of their trip, the end of their school year, pulling their canoes on shore as the late-afternoon sun spills over the river, smelling the willow and cattail and tule on the riverbank, feeling the wind in their hair and the gratifying soreness in their muscles, perhaps the students have come to know this one part of the world in a deeper, more meaningful way than they did before.

For Judi Lampi, sharing this experience is the greatest reward. It continues a journey that her grandfather began for her in the woods and waterways of the Northwest coast. At the end of a school year, she has taught her students many things and many new words, but perhaps more than anything, she has taught them what we might mean when we say the word "home." ■

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Native Plants, Native Knowledge

INSIGHTS FROM JUDY BLUEHORSE SKELTON

By Bracken Reed

PORTLAND, Oregon—Including a Native American perspective on both the Lewis and Clark expedition and the use of native plants is an integral part of Judy Lampi's ethnobotany class at Harriet Tubman Middle School.

"I think students should know the first nations' stories," Lampi says. "And I think it's important that each group of people tell their own story."

Whenever possible, Lampi turns to Judy Bluehorse Skelton. A trained herbalist with a broad knowledge of native plants, Skelton leads students on field trips to identify native plants, conducts hands-on classroom activities demonstrating their medicinal and dietary uses, and helps teachers develop culturally appropriate curriculum.

Skelton's expertise is in great demand. She's an Indian education specialist for the Portland Public School system, a member and mentor of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society, and an assistant in the Clinic Medicinary at the National College of Naturopathic Medicine in Portland. But her most important work, she says, is in creating a deeper context and understanding of Native cultures.

"Things that can appear solely utilitarian to an outsider are actually embedded with a great deal of meaning for Native people," she says. "The gathering of plants, for example, is a spiritually significant and ceremonial act. That is the very heart of the culture, and it gets skipped over, I think, because teachers often find it too daunting.

"Too often, non-Indians view certain objects or activities as mere accessories," says Skelton. "Beadwork, headdresses, face paint, Native baskets—these can be very enchanting, just on a surface level. But they are very powerful, and they all have a deep ceremonial meaning for Native people. It's so important that teachers resist the temptation to trivialize Indian culture, which is what happens when you present these things without acknowledging their full meaning and importance.

"I get invited all the time to give presentations about the Native uses for specific plants," says Skelton, "but for me it's much more important to talk about relationships—that plants are part of who we are. I try to highlight those relationships of interdependence that we have with plant and animal life, rather than giving them a kind of recipe or list of plants and uses that has no context. For Indian people, the physical, spiritual, and ceremonial uses of plants are indistinguishable."

This is a message, Skelton says, that kids are ready to hear. "My observation in working with young people, both in the Indian community and non-Indian community, is that our children are hungry for ceremony. When we're out hiking or if we're in the classroom doing an activity on native plants, they love to hear the stories. Children will leap right to those opportunities to create relationships, and that's as important in education as learning to read, or write, or do math. How to form healthy relationships, how to create a good community, how to create a good life for yourself: That's probably more important, in a traditional Native view of education, than anything else."

This kind of learning often requires stepping outside the classroom and into the larger world, says Skelton. "Many students learn better by doing and by using all of their senses. We need to recognize that there are many kinds of knowledge and many ways to contribute to a community. There are hands-on, project-based activities of all kinds that teachers can do throughout the grade levels that can be very transforming. The study of native plants, out in the field, is a good example. When you extend students' learning beyond the classroom in this way, it gives a broader opportunity for all kids to shine."

This is a lesson, Skelton says, that is clearly visible in the Lewis and Clark story. "Many people bring up the story of the vote that the Corps took to decide on a winter camp, which resulted in the building of Fort Clatsop." It is significant that Sacagawea and York were given equal representation, Skelton says, but teachers and historians often miss the real significance of that vote. "There was a transformation that took place in Lewis and Clark from the beginning of the journey to that moment on the coast. The values and codes that they lived by had been altered by their close connection with nature and the fact that they were living in a very close, cooperative community. When you live in this way, different talents come to light, different kinds of skills and knowledge become valued. Native people were already living this way. What that vote shows is how transforming the journey was for the members of the Corps."

For Judi Lampi, Skelton's visit to her classroom made a lasting impression. "I want my students to respect other cultures, and I want them to be respectful of the connections between plants and human life," says Lampi. "Judy came to the classroom and spoke about these things in a way that made these values very concrete. She brewed a medicinal tea using some of the native plants we had been studying, and she offered a prayer. It really brought home the spiritual relationship we have, or should have, with plants. It was a very positive experience."

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STORIES FROM THE RIVER AND THE BANK

Sharing her knowledge of native plants and the important role they can play in our lives is only part of Skelton's work at Portland Public Schools. She also provides guidance and culturally appropriate strategies for handling Native American content in the classroom. With the bicentennial in full swing, Skelton is increasingly being asked to give her perspective on the Lewis and Clark expedition.

"American history has almost always been told from a Euro-American point of view," says Skelton, "and the Lewis and Clark story is no different." Even in many recent books and documentaries the expedition is presented as a straightforward tale of adventure, discovery, and triumph, notes Skelton. "You still hear a lot of that kind of language — for instance, that Lewis and Clark conquered a new land. That tells me we still have a long way to go."

Of Nez Perce, Cherokee, and Chickasaw descent, Skelton works closely with schools to develop curriculum that is culturally appropriate and informed by a Native perspective. For Native people, she says, the Lewis and Clark story is understandably complicated and emotionally complex. Skelton makes comparisons between the current bicentennial and the Columbus quincentennial of 1992. "That was a very dark time for many Indian people," she says. "It brought a lot of painful history and issues back to the surface. But it was also a very constructive time for those who were able to take a long-term view. A lot of valuable work was done in establishing the importance of a Native point of view and in helping Native people move beyond anger and victimization to a more empowered place. It was an opportunity for healing and for meaningful dialogue."

The bicentennial offers many of the same challenges and opportunities, especially for teachers, says Skelton. "It's a very complex subject, and there's no way you can quickly or easily reframe the whole issue. It's hard to capture within the limits of the classroom and it can be painful history to share with children: the aftermath of the journey, what happened after Lewis and Clark went back home. But it's a story that needs to be shared. And in a good way, a hopeful way."

One of the ways this can be done is by weaving a current Native American perspective or voice into whatever curriculum one is using with the Lewis and Clark story. "I would love to see curriculum that takes this story and develops discussion questions that encourage critical thinking," says Skelton. "Questions like: What do you think happened to the tribes after the Lewis and Clark journey? Why do you think things happened the way they did? What role does trust play in the interaction between two very different cultures? What does it mean to give your word? These kinds of questions can lead to important thinking about real issues that are still very much with us."

Some educators might question whether the classroom is an appropriate forum for discussing such issues. "I think it is," says Skelton. "Even younger students can think very analytically about Native issues. When I'm in the classroom, even at the fourth-grade level [where these subjects are usually introduced in Oregon public schools], students often ask me questions that go way beyond what the teachers are expecting. They're very interested in these issues if they're presented in appropriate ways, and they're very capable of discussing them."

One example Skelton points to as an opportunity for reframing the Lewis and Clark story is a reevaluation of the space-travel metaphor that many historians have used when talking about the journey. "You often hear historians compare the journey to a trip to the moon," she says. "They emphasize how new and strange everything must have been for Lewis and Clark. But you can also turn that view around. Native people had been here all along, it was home to them. From a tribal perspective, especially for those who had never seen white people before, it must have been like Lewis and Clark came from the moon. When you look at it from that viewpoint, you can present some interesting questions. For example, how would contemporary Americans treat two completely foreign explorers today, compared to how the tribes treated Lewis and Clark? Kids can really relate to these kinds of questions."

Skelton is often asked to provide educators and students with a Native American viewpoint. She sees this as both a privilege and a responsibility, but she is also quick to point out that hers is only one voice. "There are 530 federally recognized tribes within the United States," she says, "which means there are many, many different points of view. It's important to let each tribe represent itself whenever possible." She encourages teachers and administrators to check tribal Web sites and to contact tribes directly, noting that most tribes have cultural liaisons that will visit schools or send appropriate materials. "Tap into the Indian community in your area," says Skelton. "You can't go wrong when you let Native people tell their own story." □

Expeditions in Learning

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE COLUMBIA GORGE "ENLIST" IN A COURSE THAT SENDS THEM INTO THE DEEP WATERS OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING.

Story by Larry McClure. Photos by Denise Jarrett Weeks

STEVENSON, Washington— Nearly 200 years ago Wishram, Wasco, and Chinook Indians watched incredulously as Lewis and Clark's dugout canoes plunged through several falls of the Columbia that even today's avid whitewater thrill-seekers would avoid. The final long chute near present-day Stevenson, Washington, was so rough and rocky the expedition had to portage boats and baggage around it.

Most students at Stevenson High School have grown up along a much lazier Columbia River, tamed by dams built by their grandparents. So when a new two-credit interdisciplinary course called The Lewis and Clark Expedition was listed in the 2002–2003 curriculum guide, it sounded like a no-brainer, easy-elective-credit yawner.

Senior Amy Fowler wrote a children's book about the Corps of Discovery.

Yet, as the school year is ending this spring, student Expedition members and their teacher-captains are feeling much like the original Corps of Discovery as it headed down the Columbia Gorge toward the Pacific: whiplashed by unanticipated whirlpools, yet full of anticipation and still headed downstream toward their goal.

DISCOVERY BY DESIGN

Located an hour east of Vancouver, this rural district is still transitioning from a timber-based economy. The upscale Skamania Lodge and nearby Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center have helped make the town a tourist destination, but without replacing high-paying forestry jobs. Some families, including teachers, have lived in the area for several generations, loyal to the lifestyle of the Gorge and its legendary scenery and outdoor attractions.

Thanks to a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Stevenson High School is engaged in a wall-to-wall reform effort. It launched the Expedition course to test the notion of project-based learning as a strategy for raising academic achievement. The grant also provides scholarships to students from low-income families. The Gates Foundation, through the Washington Education Foundation, gives out 500 scholarships to students at "Achiever" schools around the state—each scholarship is as much as $8,500 a year for five years. For students in a town rebounding from the loss of its timber economy,

the scholarships improve their college prospects considerably. As have their successes in the project-based Expedition course.

While Lewis and Clark hand-picked their Corps members and ordered lashings for rule-breakers, Expedition teachers Bill LaCombe, Craig McKee, and Jill Neyenhouse accepted all 70 students who "enlisted" in the course and expected each to give his or her best effort. Though course requirements are both academically and physically challenging, most students—even those who usually struggle—are discovering that they can do serious academic work and meet the exacting standards of the "real world" beyond the school walls.

Looking back, the three teachers admit they did not anticipate the wide range of issues they'd face—from securing Native American blessings for canoe building to finding camping sites for the "final exam": a river trip down the Columbia in June. Students have been involved in every phase of the course, in the detailed planning and communication—even making presentations to the school board. For McKee, this required a transformation in his teaching style. Accustomed to having his physical education students follow set routines and procedures as a group, he now had to coach kids on a variety of projects.

"The Lewis and Clark Expedition class definitely pushed teachers and everyone out of our comfort zone," says Sergio Fossa, principal at Stevenson High School for 10 years. He believes the Gates school redesign project will prompt more project-oriented learning at the school.

The Stevenson-Carson School District framed its school redesign efforts around the work of Theodore Sizer and the Coalition of Essential Schools. Staff members received training in seven key elements of school restructuring: personalized learning, technology as a tool, common focus, time to collaborate, respect and responsibility, high expectations, and performance-based instruction and assessment.

"We want to create an environment where we are meeting more students' needs and are sending a greater number of kids on to college," says English teacher Neyenhouse. And Fossa says that students who've received Achiever scholarships are staying in college at greater rates than in the past.

WRITING TO LEARN

Writing is a big component of the Expedition course. Students receive an English elective credit, as well as a credit for PE or Occupational Education. Teachers use the journals of

The Journals

If Jefferson had not required the officers to document each day of their journey, the Corps of Discovery would have been just another campfire yarn passed down by trappers and traders. Thanks to their million-plus words, students now have access to the same raw material that scholars use. In time for the bicentennial, the most comprehensive collection of the writings of five Corps of Discovery journal keepers is available both in paperbound book, *The Definitive Journals of Lewis & Clark*, Gary E. Moulton, editor (University of Nebraska Press, 2003), and online at http://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/.

These are not just primary sources for studying history. Teachers and students are already dreaming up dozens of ways to use them in the K–12 classroom for reading and writing—particularly for lessons around grammar, spelling, and punctuation. They also are seeing how the journals can serve as models for poetry, drama, personal reflection, and scientific notation. For a reality-based lesson on the importance of careful spelling, punctuation, complete sentences, and capitalization, some teachers ask students to edit a daily journal entry into today's proper English.

The Corps of Discovery journalists had no spell checker. Webster's dictionary came 25 years later. The captains themselves had received limited formal education, though Meriwether Lewis had access to Jefferson's legendary library at Monticello and rubbed shoulders with visiting scholars and artists at the White House. The men were, shall we say, phonetic spellers. As they study the journals, students often discover that their own excuses for sloppy writing or late assignments don't compare to the hardships faced by the Corps of Discovery. These officers kept writing night after night despite lurking grizzlies, rain, sleet, subzero temperatures that froze the ink for their quill pens, and other better reasons for skipping a day of journaling.

—Larry McClure

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Working with a professional playwright-in-residence, Ben Bliss and other seniors co-wrote a play about Sacagawea.

Lewis and Clark as the foundation for student reading and research. Students, however, are held to much tougher writing standards than were the spelling-impaired journal writers of the Corps of Discovery. Students' reports must be on time, revised often, and spelled correctly. In the process, students soon learn to appreciate how note taking, drafting, and revising are easier with keyboards than with quills.

Senior Tyler Blaisdell particularly liked researching and writing a children's book for third-graders at Stevenson Elementary School. Knowing that real people would be reading his book was a big motivator, says Tyler, and he put more time and care into this project than any other during his years at Stevenson High.

"My book received many compliments from the third-graders," he proudly notes. The younger students partnered with their high school mentors in developing the books. "It was actually pretty cool to see the children's faces when their own original ideas became a great work of art," says Blaisdell. "I think they were also impressed that we older kids took time to be with them."

Tyler and fellow students went through a three-stage production cycle with their third-grade partners: finding out what these youngsters would like to know about the Lewis and Clark party and the Indian tribes they met; sharing a rough draft with the kids to see which words were difficult for them; and reading their final creations aloud.

Each student is completing a showcase project for display at the Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center, Skamania Lodge, or at the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center in The Dalles. Students wrote three drafts of a 10-page research paper that is the foundational piece of their projects. This spring they are wrapping up their products, including such things as a Claymation™ of Lewis and Clark, a Columbia Gorge topographical map, bullet bags displayed in a shadow box, a Lewis and Clark board game, arrows and quiver, and a hand-finished cedar-strip canoe.

Student Crystal Helkey, whose heritage is Minnesota-Chippewa, is creating a jingle dress, regalia worn by Native American dancers. The designs of the jingle dresses convey important knowledge from tribal elders to newer generations. One challenge: getting the right tobacco tin lids from adults in the community. Brett Yeadon's project required building a custom-designed steam chamber to soften a six-foot hickory cutout he molded into a high-performance hunting bow. Senior Josh Maxwell, who works part time in the woods as a timber feller, is building a log entertainment center that Lewis and Clark would have wanted during their long, rainy winter at Fort Clatsop.

PASSING MUSTER

LaCombe, the school's technology education teacher, is particularly excited about an authentic dugout canoe students are making in the style of canoes made by Chinook Indians two centuries ago. The first major hurdle was securing a large-enough Western red cedar log, now rare and expensive. Thanks to the U.S. Forest Service, a prime log was delivered to the school parking lot in late fall. Next was the challenge of locating tribal experts to show students how to proceed.

One of the first cultural protocols students and teachers learned was the tribal blessing of a fallen cedar tree that must take place before transforming the log into a canoe. Students in this community that depends so heavily on natural resources are being reminded of the "circle of life" philosophy of Native American people—sustainable resources are part of millennia-old ways of life.

Students divided themselves into groups with specific assignments. The "legal team," for example, has been researching river safety issues with the Coast Guard as well as liability insurance for the June river trip. Other teams are responsible for handling district policies, field trips, safety, publicity, liaison with the community and elementary school,

design of a Web site, and documenting class activities for posterity. Presentations to the school board were important milestones along the way.

Teachers draw on their particular expertise: Neyenhouse sets criteria for student written work; McKee oversees physical conditioning, CPR, boat handling, and safety skills; and LaCombe advises students on construction technologies.

In June, students who've passed muster throughout the course will make a four-day paddle journey down the Columbia to Astoria, using the two boats they've made themselves, as well as other boats supplied by willing parents. Along their route, they will camp near historic campsites of the Corps of Discovery. And it doesn't escape some of the students' notice that they are about the same age as the teenage Sacagawea when she made the same trip in the fall of 1805. □

Dramatic Action

Five Stevenson High School students with an interest in drama and playwriting took on the daunting task of researching and writing a play on the theme of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

Ben Bliss, a senior who plans to study art after graduating, said the team was attracted to the "ballot," or vote, that determined where the Corps of Discovery would spend the winter of 1805–1806. Now covered by asphalt east of the Astoria-Megler Bridge, Station Camp was the site where Sacagawea, a Shoshone woman, and York, Clark's slave, had their votes recorded along with the other Corps members.

That event foreshadowed dramatic changes to come, though it would be nearly 60 years before slaves were emancipated, 115 years before women got the vote, and 160 years before the Voting Rights Act assured all citizens the right to cast their ballots.

In the play, a woman is selected by Thomas Jefferson to write a popular narrative about the Lewis and Clark journey for the general public (a task Meriwether Lewis never finished). As was done in those times when women's contributions were minimized, she's told her name can't be listed as the author. This becomes the central dramatic conflict: Shall persons be judged by the merit of the gifts and talents they bring or by traditional social status and stereotypes?

Though they didn't all study drama in high school, all five of the student playwrights—Ben and classmates Darby Roeder, Crystal Lopez, Ryan Accetta, and Sarah Davis—are good writers, says English teacher and drama coach Doug Johnson who serves as their senior project mentor. Thanks to a grant from the Washington State Arts Commission to the Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center in Stevenson, Portland playwright and actor Lorraine Bahr was commissioned to advise the students during the eight months of play development that took place after school.

"I was tremendously impressed with the hundreds of hours of historical research the students did," says Bahr, who advised the playwrights on conceptualizing and building the drama from scratch. "They have developed a thoughtful, wonderful play which the community deserves to see," she said.

Students pored over Lewis and Clark literature, visited museums, heard presentations by historians and other experts, and went to see the National Geographic Society's IMAX film on the Lewis and Clark expedition. Johnson says the students have become their own "corps of discovery," learning what it takes to become a team, meet timelines, use primary sources, work with adults they would never have met normally, create art that must meet community standards, and be historically accurate while interpreting the story with today's eyes.

The playwrights hope to stage a public reading this spring, and next year's drama students could decide to mount a full production. And who knows, if all goes well, maybe a theatre company will produce it as part of Washington's Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Commemoration.

—Larry McClure

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A Confluence of Stories

A Canadian teacher and his multicultural students learn about Lewis and Clark's river passage across the continent, where people of many nations were shaping history.

STORY BY LARRY MCCLURE
PHOTOS BY DENISE JARRETT WEEKS

WOODBURN, Oregon—When David Ellingson teaches his Lewis and Clark class at Woodburn High School, students encounter the intrigue of international politics, the down and dirty of reality TV, and images of Superman.

Canadian by birth, Ellingson never heard of the Corps of Discovery until becoming certified as a history and science teacher in the United States seven years ago. And it is the same story for most of his students. Half are Latino and another 15 percent are Russian, young people who have never heard of these early American heroes.

The semester-long elective course begins with the primordial Pacific Northwest, then the Native people of the region, and moves on to explore the question: Why did the rest of the world become so interested in the geography between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean? Class discussions range from making comparisons between the history of the Lewis and Clark expedition and history that is being made today in the Middle East, to studying the scientific basis for contemporary issues, such as water rights, energy conservation, and salmon.

Before the semester is finished, students will have experienced some of the same demands and discoveries documented by the Corps 200 years ago. For instance, they found the plant, shooting star, still growing along the Columbia River at the very spot where Meriwether Lewis first described it for botanists.

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Word has spread about this elective course that juniors and seniors can take either for history or science credit, whichever they need to graduate. One parent quizzically called the school to ask if his student could enroll in the "Superman class," thinking the course theme was built around Lois and Clark.

Student Stacey May agrees that members of the Corps of Discovery were superheroes who took "one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind." Though, she says, their task was even more daunting than NASA's first moonwalk 30 years ago. Schoolmate Michael Hemshorn says, "People like Lewis and Clark lay their life on the line for the good of their country, and without them the world would certainly be a different place."

This view is shared by Senator Robert Byrd, a Democrat from West Virginia who sponsored the Teaching American History Grant Program. The "sage of the Senate" believes American history should be taught as a separate course of study. Students in Woodburn say they appreciate the chance to spend more time on just one historical event rather than skimming rapidly across centuries and decades of people and events that shaped our world and nation.

TAKING PERSPECTIVE

For Ellingson, Canadian history books covering this period focused on Alexander Mackenzie, the Hudson's Bay explorer who made the first transcontinental land voyage more than 10 years before Lewis and Clark. Coming west along the Fraser River instead of the Columbia, it was Mackenzie's report that prompted Jefferson to try once again to find the mythical Northwest Passage after three prior attempts failed to get paddles into the Missouri.

About the same time, Ellingson tells students, Russians were pushing south into present-day Alaska and British Columbia. Spaniards were making gains from the south, and indeed tried to intercept the Corps of Discovery three different times to stop American incursions west from the Mississippi River. It was also Spanish-heritage horses that enabled the expedition to cross the Rockies and Bitterroots, another connection today's Hispanic students have to early U.S. history.

"What surprised me the most about the story," says Eleazar Puente, himself Latino, "was how they were able to accomplish what they wanted with people whose language they did not know." For him, it was an early example of how bridges between cultures are successfully built.

Seeing how their ancestors helped shape early American history, many of Ellingson's multicultural students discover this is a class that speaks directly to them. Ellingson regularly draws parallels to current events, such as how today's European American encounters with Middle East tribes and ethnic groups are similar to, yet different from, the 50-plus tribes Lewis and Clark met. Observing that international trade in pelts and furs was the motivation for seeking the Northwest Passage centuries ago, Ellingson points to exports of wheat, fruit, Nike sneakers, and Boeing airplanes as today's examples of how international commerce is still a driving force in the Northwest economy.

GOING DEEP AND WIDE

Ellingson exemplifies the energy and enthusiasm that teachers often show after they see how deep and wide the Lewis and Clark story really is. Already a busy dad with three elementary-age kids and a full load of high school biology classes, creating an entirely new course without a readymade curriculum would scare

TOOLS OF SCIENCE

Like many of today's hobby astronomers, botanists, and microbiologists, Lewis and Clark were the first to document important species new to Western science. Professional scientists still use them as benchmarks and marker species today. The Corps of Discovery documented 300 plants and animals that experts on the East Coast or Europe had never seen. Corps members kept daily weather descriptions even after the thermometers broke and temperatures couldn't be monitored. While recording latitude was relatively easy, measuring longitude was more problematic since the captains often forgot to wind up the clock in the chronometer. Moreover, never-ending clouds in the Northwest blocked out the noonday sun and evening star readings.

The expedition came equipped with the best scientific instruments of the time, however. Thanks to military experience, Clark had learned surveying skills and Lewis spent several weeks in Philadelphia taking crash courses in science from a leading botanist, navigation expert, and medical doctor, among others. Both Lewis and Clark were experienced outdoorsmen and Lewis's mother was a skilled herbalist. The captains' first-aid box was filled with potions and powders that would be banned today; the two accepted treatments for serious illnesses were purgatives laced with mercury and bloodletting—both used liberally. High school health, PE, and nutrition coursework today address issues that were also serious problems for the expedition: how diet affects performance, how to safely lift and carry heavy loads, how bacteria cause food to spoil, how infectious disease spreads.

—Larry McClure

TEACHING HISTORY EXPERIENTIALLY

Stevenson and Woodburn high schools are examples of two settings where teachers are breaking away from traditional instruction about Lewis and Clark. For decades, the history of Lewis and Clark has been the domain of fourth-grade or middle school teachers. But high school teachers are also engaging their older students in the rich learning opportunities that are present in the Lewis and Clark stories.

Indeed, the fact that there are multiple stories surrounding the historical event of the Corps of Discovery is a theme of study at Stevenson High School in Washington (see story on Page 26) and Woodburn High School in Oregon. Teachers at these schools point out that the 50 or more Native tribes that encountered Lewis and Clark and the other Corps members weren't waiting around for someone to "discover" them. They had been living successfully in complex, self-sustaining societies for millennia before the introduction of white settlers and their diseases. In fact, the Columbia and Willamette rivers were heavily-traveled waterways for Native people. Today's State Highway 14 that leads to Stevenson and Interstate 5 to Woodburn trace overland trails used by Chinook and Kalapooya Indians.

Both high schools are also demonstrating the power of studying American history through experiential learning. They've created entire courses based on the study of the Lewis and Clark expedition, and many features of these courses align with those recommended by national planners for the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial. The planners suggest that schools help students see the multiple stories of this historic event in four dimensions:

1. What the world was like in pre-recorded history
2. What happened during Lewis and Clark's journey
3. What has happened in the 200 years since
4. That students today are the nation's future explorers who will help achieve breakthroughs in human relations, science, music, art, communication, and technology

Ask any student in a Lewis and Clark course at Stevenson or Woodburn what he or she likes most, and it's likely to be the hands-on activities, teamwork, accountability for results, and indepth exposure to meaningful knowledge. Students in both schools say they appreciate not being in "just another class with lectures and videos," though they also see how such basic skills as reading, writing, and computation were essential to expedition members' daily survival. Being able to "live" history by seeing the actual places where events occurred—thus, getting a personal taste of what it might have been like—is a powerful way to learn about their nation's history, they say.

—Larry McClure

off most teachers and administrators. With the full support of Principal Laura Lanka, however, Ellingson launched the new class in January 2002, barely keeping ahead of the students with his own independent reading and research. Calling on help from Oregon members of the Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Ellingson found people willing to suggest ideas, share materials, and open doors.

"Before this class I knew who Lewis and Clark were, but I didn't really know what significance they had to this country and to history," said Puente, a senior. "Reading their journals was a big part in this class, and I learned many things that way."

As at Stevenson High School (See story on Page 26), Ellingson asked his students this year to prove what they'd learned by preparing children's books on the Corps of Discovery and then reading their stories to elementary school students. Michael Hemshorn, who graduates this spring, says the best part of this research and writing project was being viewed as an expert on Lewis and Clark in the eyes of the younger kids. "It was fun being able to answer their questions," says Hemshorn. He says he would like to study biology and history in college.

Right from the beginning, students go on field trips and camping expeditions, important supplements to classroom and laboratory work. Students conduct studies along the Columbia River Gorge, at Fort Clatsop, and nearby historic sites at St. Paul (a little-known grave site of a French-Canadian boatman hired to bring the Corps of Discovery's keelboat and first scientific collections back to Jefferson from present-day North Dakota), a natural history museum at Mt. Angel Seminary, as well as local seed processing plants and the city's waste recovery center.

GETTING THEIR HANDS "DIRTY"

Ellingson believes both science and history instruction can be enhanced with hands-on learning experiences. Despite the fact that most of the young women and men in that first class had never camped out in their lives, on a spring day in 2002, they loaded into a school bus with teachers and parent volunteers, bound to learn how to cook over open fires and spend a cold, windy night in the Columbia River Gorge. The next morning, before returning to town, they traveled to the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center in The Dalles to hear famed Lewis and Clark archaeologist Ken Karsmizki describe his quests.

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Previous page: Woodburn High School teacher David Ellingson (second from left) poses with alums of his history/science course on Lewis and Clark—some students "enlisted" for the class more than once.
Above: Woodburn students Isidro Mejia, Sophie Lopez, Kristian Bloomkvist, Issac Guzman, Margi Felix, Jacob Bagdhanov, Megan Melton, Javier Ayala.

Says Stacey May: "I liked staying overnight at Memaloose State Park and the history behind the island out in the middle of the river. The most interesting part was the guest speaker who answered many questions about how they know if the sites are really in the right location. I kept thinking about that later when Mr. Ellingson said we were standing at one of their camping spots."

Ellingson begins his class by looking at the Northwest in the millennia before Native people appeared. Evidence of prehistoric Willamette Valley cultures is a stone's throw from Ellingson's classroom and archaeological research is old news on this campus. Students examine the impact of the Missoula flood on the Columbia and Willamette river system and pose questions about early peoples in their own valley region, still a rich and diverse farming area. A human hair dating back 10,000 years is one of the artifacts uncovered at the high school dig site. Volunteer archaeologists from Portland and the Willamette often join the students on research projects.

MEETING HIGH STANDARDS

Students then examine Thomas Jefferson's detailed set of instructions to Lewis—a letter 16 pages long describing what the officers were to watch for, measure, and write down in daily journals. The instructions are comparable to the education standards students today are expected to meet in order to graduate. Jefferson's mission statement became the final test for Lewis and Clark just as Oregon's Certificates of Initial and Advanced Mastery are the way students are proving they can meet society's expectations in this century.

Ellingson's syllabus for the class aligns with Oregon standards for history and science, and students rarely see the difference as they blend research with hands-on experience. The journals kept by Lewis and Clark are the one constant reading and research tool, supplemented by Paul Russell Cutright's *Lewis and Clark: Pioneering Naturalists,* a step-by-step record of the expedition's biological discoveries for Western science. Before semester ends, students will learn and apply the same botanical preservation and classification skills that Lewis and Clark used—often finding those same plants still growing in the Willamette Valley and along the Columbia River today.

During the final weeks of the course, Ellingson introduces post-Lewis and Clark issues that have emerged during the subsequent 200 years: decline of the fur trade and westward expansion, tribal dispersion, the reservation system, treaties still in force, extinction of species, damming of rivers, declines in salmon runs—but always pushing students to examine each issue from all points of view before coming to their own individual conclusions. □

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TRAIL FOODS

Mary Gunderson's work is so unusual that she coined a term for it: paleocuisineology®. A food writer and culinary historian from South Dakota, Gunderson dives into primary historical documents to unearth the foods and recipes that graced tables—and tents—in bygone eras. She's written about the "cuisine" of the Corps of Discovery in two tantalizing and fact-filled books that will inspire teachers, parents, and kids to tuck in for hours of fun and learning.

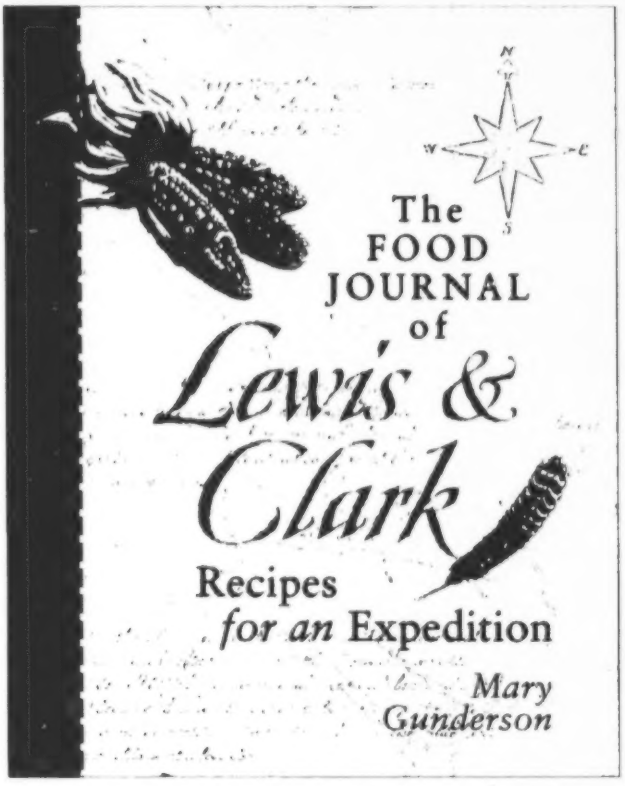
The Food Journal of Lewis & Clark: Recipes for an Expedition (History Cooks, 2003) includes the sophisticated cuisine that Thomas Jefferson enjoyed as well as the savory wild game, hominy, and plum tarts the Corps members dined on along the trail.

Cooking on the Lewis and Clark Expedition is part of the series Exploring History through Simple Recipes (Capstone Press, 2000). The books, written in consultation with a curriculum consultant, are designed for kids in grades three through six.

"Lewis and Clark wrote about food almost every day," says Gunderson. "There are really nice moments in the journals about the food on the trip, then there are things that are startling to us today," such as reports that each Corps member ate 10 pounds of meat each day. (Gunderson thinks it was more like five.)

"Food really does help tell the story of where they were, culturally and geographically. It helps tell the story of the trip across the continent," she says.

Using food as a "time machine," she recreates the tastiest of the Corps members' meals—many of them inspired by Hidatsa and Mandan Indians—such as corn with sunflower and black beans. And she wouldn't dream of leaving out Charbonneau's famous Buffalo Boudin Blanc.



Usually, this is just what a kid needs to perk up his or her appetite for learning about the Lewis and Clark expedition and its importance to the history of the nation. And it fits right into cross-curricular learning, she says: "It's about culture, nutrition, geography, social studies, history, and it's about math and measuring—creative teachers are having a lot of fun with it."

Gunderson is a frequent visitor to classrooms where, in no time, she fills the air with delicious smells. For more information, visit her Web site: www.HistoryCooks.com/.

IN THE WORKS

Portland writer and filmmaker Ron Craig is developing a PBS documentary on the African American slave, York, who was a member of the Corps of Discovery. His children's book about York will be published this year by National Geographic Society. Additionally, he was instrumental in having Portland's NW York Street be officially named for the only black Corps member who, along with Sacagawea, was allowed to vote with their white counterparts. Ron Craig frequently speaks at schools, telling students about the participation of York in the historic journey (filmworksnw@attbi.com).

MORE BOOKS

A Charbonneau Family Portrait: Biographical Sketches of Sacagawea, Jean Baptiste, and Toussaint Charbonneau by Irving W.A. Anderson (Fort Clatsop Historical Association, 1992)

The Expeditions of Lewis & Clark and Zebulon Pike: North American Journeys edited by Washington state educators Richard D. Scheuerman and Arthur Ellis. A collection of primary source materials and study guides, the book aligns with education standards (Demco, 2001).

Going Along With Lewis & Clark by Barbara Fifer (*Montana Magazine*, 2000)

In Search of York: The Slave Who Went to the Pacific With Lewis and Clark by Robert B. Betts (Colorado Associated University Press, 2001)

The Incredible Journey of Lewis & Clark by Rhoda Blumberg (Turtleback Books, 1995). This book for young readers highlights the contributions of Native people to the expedition.

The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition Online is a Web version of Gary E. Moulton's 1983 *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* published in 13 volumes by University of Nebraska Press (http://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/)

Lewis and Clark Among the Indians by James P. Ronda (University of Nebraska Press, 1984, 2002)

Lewis and Clark: Pioneering Naturalists by Paul Russell Cutright (University of Nebraska Press, 1989)

Lewis and Clark Trail Maps, volumes I and II, by Martin Plamondon II of Vancouver, Washington, show—for the first time in 200 years—the courses of the Missouri, Snake, and Columbia rivers as they were when the Corps of Discovery traveled their waterways, and as they are now. Excerpts from the expedition diaries are included (Washington State University Press, 2000, 2001).

Or Perish in the Attempt: Wilderness Medicine in the Lewis & Clark Expedition by David J. Peck (Farcountry Press, 2001)

WEB SITES

A Bethel School District 52 Curriculum Project
The Lewis and Clark Expedition Bicentennial
www.bethel.k12.or.us/lewisandclark/

This Oregon school district invites teachers and students in grades K–12 to participate in short- and long-term projects, WebQuests, and classroom-to-classroom activities in reading, science, history, and more.

Discovering Lewis & Clark
www.lewis-clark.org/

This Web site includes general background on the Corps of Discovery, including a 19-part synopsis of the expedition by historian Harry Fritz with illustrations from the Lewis and Clark journals, photographs, maps, and audio-video presentations.

Jefferson's West
Monticello: The Home of Thomas Jefferson
www.monticello.org/jefferson/lewisandclark/

A Lewis and Clark study resource for teachers and students includes background essays, classroom activities, timelines, maps, and links to books and other resources. A link to Discovery Paths: Native Nations provides video clips of oral histories from tribal experts and more.

Lewis & Clark College
www.thejourneycontinues.org/

Throughout the bicentennial, the college is offering conferences, lectures, symposia, exhibits, publications, and special events for teachers and others. A summer institute for teachers will involve working with primary source documents to create grade-appropriate curricular materials. The college's collection of Lewis and Clark historical books and other materials is the most comprehensive in the world. This site also features "200 Years Ago This Week," summaries of the Lewis and Clark journals.

Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation
www.lewisandclark.org/

The Foundation's curriculum guide, *An American Legacy: The Lewis and Clark Expedition,* includes ideas and source materials linked to national standards in language arts, social studies, geography, human behavior, life skills, Native American cultures, visual arts, music, and natural science. Included are many other resources and links to state chapters where teachers can get in touch with Foundation members who are willing to help schools interpret the expedition stories.

National Council of the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial
www.lewisandclark200.org/

This site has up-to-the-minute information about bicentennial activities around the nation. It includes links to individual state bicentennial offices and the Council of Tribal Advisors, which works to clarify tribal roles and promote cultural sensitivity and the stewardship of sacred and historic resources.

National Geographic Society
Lewis & Clark Online Base Camp
www.nationalgeographic.com/lewisandclark/index.html

This site offers fun, interactive learning adventures for kids and classroom resources for teachers.

National Lewis and Clark Education Center
University of Montana
www.lewisandclarkeducationcenter.com/

At this site, teachers and students will find ecological and spatial information collected along the Lewis and Clark trail by NASA remote-sensing technology. As they explore regions of the trail, they will find a variety of resources available from satellite imagery, historical lithographs, maps, journal entries, and collected data.

National Park Service
Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail
www.nps.gov/lecl/

This site's Education link features books, curricula, and other useful Web sites. It also provides information about the Corps of Discovery II, a traveling interpretive center that will exhibit along the Lewis and Clark trail during the next three years. The exhibit includes a Tent of Many Voices where experts and entertainers will make presentations and perform. Representatives from Native American tribes will be featured at each stop and may also be available for local school visits.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
Lewis & Clark's Expedition: Curriculum Ideas & Education Resources
www.nwrel.org/teachlewisandclark/home.html

Teachers will get lots of good ideas from this site that features the completed project, "Teach Lewis and Clark: Updating the Journals Nearly 200 Years Later," in which teachers and students studied their communities to find out what had changed since the journey of the Corps of Discovery. Also featured are newspaper articles from The Legacy Grows: Lewis & Clark Special from *The Oregonian* and guidelines for communicating the multiple stories surrounding the Lewis and Clark expedition, particularly those of Native people.

Oregon Public Education Network
www.open.k12.or.us/oregon/lcb/

This portal includes video and audio recordings from a 15-week statewide videoconference for Oregon teachers. Historians, archaeologists, musicians, and Native American tribal experts share their knowledge and wisdom with teachers who want to draw on community resources to develop rich classroom learning experiences based on the Lewis and Clark stories.

Public Broadcasting System
www.pbs.org/lewisandclark/

This site is a companion to the documentary "Lewis & Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery" by Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan. Teachers and kids will find stories about the world of Lewis, Clark, and the rest of the Corps of Discovery, Indian tribes, maps and journals, interviews with historians, and classroom resources.

Rediscovery Project
Technology Innovation Challenge Grant, U.S. Department of Education
http://rediscovery.ed.uidaho.edu/

This is a national project in which teachers along the Lewis and Clark trail are using technology to enhance their instruction of history, science, math, reading, and more. Watch this site for news about University of Idaho online courses on how teachers and students can use computer technology to document 200 years of change in their local communities. For a free compact disc providing background narratives, graphics, and artwork on the Corps of Discovery, e-mail: shelleyh@uidaho.edu.

www.lewisandclark200.gov/
A partnership of 32 federal agencies

This is an easy-to-use portal to online information about Lewis and Clark historical places, events, education resources, and more.

—Larry McClure, Denise Jarrett Weeks

REDISCOVERED PORTFOLIOS: A PASSAGE THROUGH TIME

A hundred years ago, the girls of St. Mary's Academy collected their best works and bound them together in handsome books commemorating the centennial of the Corps of Discovery.

By Patricia Nida

PORTLAND, Oregon—"Remember, Patricia, this is always your home."

Spring day, 1962. The old stone-walled garden of St. Mary's Academy for girls. I'd just told Sister Francella Mary that I was leaving St. Mary's to go to a coeducational high school across town. Before sending me off to the world outside these walls, she gave me her blessings and this promise: No matter what the world beyond held for me, I'd always belong at my "home" school at St. Mary's.

Forty years later, Sister Francella's words rang in my memory like a bell when, at a meeting of the Oregon Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Committee, I heard someone mention that there were 100-year-old books stored away that had been written by St. Mary's students for the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition and World's Fair. I listened with growing excitement. They were hard-bound portfolios of third- through eighth-grade students' work, done a century after Meriwether Lewis and William Clark's Corps of Discovery explored the continent. In a friendly rivalry commemorating the centennial of the expedition, St. Mary's and other schools collected their students' best work in portfolios and submitted them to a statewide competition.

As the committee wondered what the books looked like and if we could possibly see them, I almost ran to the phone. Of course we could see them! After all, St. Mary's is my home, Sister Francella told me. So, on another spring day, I took my 18-year-old son and two of his friends to meet Sister Rosemarie Kasper at the archives of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, Oregon Province. Sister unlocked the door, moved treasured chronicles, relics, and antiques, and directed us to several boxes. In them stood the bound books of student work from 1903, displaying the quality of education offered at St. Mary's at the turn of the last century.

When the boys and I lifted them out of the box, using white gloves to protect the aged pages, we were in awe! The books' green library bindings, marbled endpapers, and pages of the finest watermarked paper were perfect. The student handwriting was elegant, the language poetic, and the pen-and-ink drawings and watercolor illustrations exquisite. We were holding history!

I've turned the pages of these books several times since then, and they fill me with pride. I'm proud of the girls in long white dresses who sat in the convent school garden and took such care to show their work. Proud of the school that has produced scholars and artists for more than a century. Proud of the girls in blue jeans who attend St. Mary's today, continuing the tradition of academic excellence. And the old books make me proud of myself.

These essays and drawings, set down in another era by the disciplined and inspired hands of young author-artists, are testament to what students can accomplish when they strive for personal excellence. This is, of course, what they were honoring in the men and one woman of the Corps of Discovery, many of whom were not much older than themselves.

POSTSCRIPT: Patricia Nida works for NWREL's Comprehensive Center and, as a member of the Oregon Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Committee, is helping schools across the country to create rich learning experiences based on the history of the expedition. She can be reached at (503) 275-9480 or nidap@nwrel.org.

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